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**Contemporising Jonathan Edwards' Theory of Spiritual Perception  
Towards an Analytic Theological Psychology of Transforming Grace with Special  
Reference to Robert Roberts**

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*Awarding institution:*  
King's College London

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**Author:** Siak Ying Yeo

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Contemporising Jonathan Edwards'  
Theory of Spiritual Perception:  
Towards an Analytic Theological Psychology of  
Transforming Grace with Special Reference to Robert Roberts

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Theology and Religious Studies,

King's College London, University of London

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Theology

by

Siak Ying (Ray) Yeo

2013

## Acknowledgement

Undertaking a research project of this magnitude would not have been possible without the support and help of many whom I am deeply indebted to. The first thanks goes to my dissertation supervisor at King's College London, Professor Clemens Sedmak. Throughout my time at King's he has been tremendously supportive of my research and have gone above and beyond his role as a supervisor to aid me in my budding academic career. This dissertation would not have been possible without his skilful supervision.

A word of gratitude must also be given to my academic mentor during my education at Talbot School of Theology, Professor Robert Saucy. In many ways, this dissertation started from the numerous informal discussions that we had together. I would also like to thank my Master thesis supervisor, Professor Oliver O'Donovan, for his seminal influence on many of the issues addressed in the dissertation. His lectures on Christian Ethics inspired my love for the subject and modelled for me what it means to be a theological ethicist.

The research would not have been possible without the financial support of the Brash Trust and its trustees. Their generous funding has given my family and me the opportunity to embark on the doctoral program in the United Kingdom. I am also indebted to the Character Project for hosting me at Wake Forest University as a residential scholar where some of the work was conducted.

My deepest thanks goes to my beloved wife whose unwavering support and sacrifice has been the emotional pillar of my life in the last four years. She embodies the life of Christian sanctification and serves as a constant reminder of what we can become in the grace of Christ. Most importantly, I am grateful to God for his loving providence and care throughout my graduate studies. It has been a long journey, but it was one in which he has never ceased to be with me and my loved ones. This dissertation is dedicated to him and his

glory. May the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

King's College London,

Spring 2013

## Abstract

This dissertation is an attempt to revisit Jonathan Edwards' theory of spiritual perception from the perspective of Robert Roberts' work in the philosophy of emotions and other related philosophical sub-disciplines with the purpose of providing a contemporary account of spiritual perception and, by extension, a theological psychology of transforming grace. The contemporisation effort focuses on three main aspects of Edwards' theory: the infusion of grace, the content of Scripture and spiritual delight. The weaknesses and limitations of Edwards' original account in these three aspects were examined and a proposal to revise, update and deepen his theory in five major ways was provided in light of the issues raised.

The contemporised account of spiritual perception constitutes an overall advancement over Edwards' original theory in two ways. First, it avoids a number of the difficulties that the original faces. Second, it further refines some aspects of Edwards' account that were underdeveloped and brings many of Edwards' insights into conversation with various spheres of contemporary discussion. Moreover, the contemporised account also examines the psychological basis of spiritual perception in a way that Edwards never did. In particular, it argues that the capacity for spiritual perception of the supreme good is grounded in a wisdom-like seminal virtue centered upon the incarnate Christ (i.e., Christocentric wisdom). Such wisdom, on the contemporised account, is considered the psychological core of transforming grace and the foundational basis upon which all other Christian virtues are formed.

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### List of Abbreviations

Comm. John	Calvin, John. Commentary on John
Elenctic	Turretin, Francis. Institutes of Elenctic Theology
Institutes	Calvin, John. Institutes of the Christian Religion
WJE	Edwards, Jonathan. Works of Jonathan Edwards

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Locating the Topic of the Study

#### 1.1.1 Purpose

Central to the thought of Jonathan Edwards is his theologically sophisticated psychology of grace or what is sometimes called his “religious psychology of the heart”<sup>1, 2</sup>. Discussion of this important subject can be found not only in his famous *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* but also throughout his vast corpus of writings, including his sermons and Miscellanies entries. Edwards’ understanding of the psychological functioning of grace may not be entirely original; much of what he says can be found in some form in his Puritan and Protestant forbearers.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, his treatment of the subject is unsurpassed in the Puritan literature in terms of the level of precision, thoroughness and systematic sophistication.<sup>4</sup> Hence, it remains one of the deepest and most fecund theological psychologies of grace in the Protestant tradition. The heart of his account comes down to his theory of spiritual perception where he locates the core and source of the engraced Christian life and true virtue.<sup>5</sup>

Edwards’ conception of spiritual perception has been enormously influential historically. It was observed by John E. Smith that “no idea in all of Edwards’ works is more original and no doctrine was more far reaching in its influence upon the course of Puritan

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<sup>1</sup> Walton (2002), p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Harold Simonson claims that the notion of the ‘sense of the heart’ “summarizes Edwards’s whole system of thought”. Although this claim is somewhat exaggerated, it does, nevertheless, reflect the centrality of the idea to his thought. Simonson (2004), p.5.

<sup>3</sup> Brad Walton in his 2002 work, challenges the claim made by scholars such as Perry Miller, John E. Smith and J. Rodney Fulcher that Edwards’ religious psychology presents “a clear break” from earlier Puritan tradition. By examining the Puritan writings of the sixteen and seventeen century, Walton mounts a convincing case that “far from representing a discontinuity with puritan traditions, Edwards’s *Religious Affections* is, in fact, a conservative extension of traditional puritan “heart religion” into the context of the Great awakening”. Walton (2002), p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Walton came to this conclusion after surveying a wide range of Puritan writings. Ibid., p.231.

<sup>5</sup> “Spiritual perception” is also commonly known as the ‘sense of the heart’ or ‘spiritual sense’ in Edwardsean studies.

piety.”<sup>6</sup> However, despite its theological fecundity and influence, his account is nevertheless close to three hundred years old and hence is unable to benefit from the insights gained from contemporary research in philosophical psychology, especially the influx of interest in the philosophy of emotions in the last thirty years.

The aim of this dissertation is to revisit Edwards’ theory of spiritual perception from the perspective of recent developments in the philosophy of emotions and other related philosophical sub-disciplines with the purpose of providing a contemporary account of spiritual perception. The intention here is not to merely retrieve or present an aspect of Edwards’ theology for the world today. By ‘contemporising’ spiritual perception, I mean to present a contemporary conception of spiritual perception by updating, deepening, expanding and even correcting aspects of Edwards’ original theory. The resultant account may not necessarily be strictly Edwardsean in nature, nor does it promise to be one that Edwards would have endorsed. The study is hence not an exercise in historical theology but an attempt at a constructive proposal for a contemporary understanding of spiritual perception that brings together the insights of recent research and the characteristic features of Edwards’ original account. The eventual aspiration of the thesis is to articulate a contemporary theological psychology of spiritual perception that could help us better understand the philosophical, psychological and theological nature of transforming grace.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.1.2 Motivation

Having located the subject of our study, perhaps it is appropriate to explain what the motivation behind the project is. Despite the recent dramatic growth of scholarly interest in

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<sup>6</sup> As mentioned in footnote 3, Smith may have overstated the originality of Edwards’ religious psychology; nevertheless, there is no denying Edwards’ unique contribution to the rigorous systematization and consolidation of earlier Puritan traditions. Smith (1959), p.30.

<sup>7</sup> My usage of the term ‘psychology’ is not narrowly restricted to the discipline of modern empirical or scientific psychology but refers to, in the words of Thomas Dixon, the “broader tradition of systematic thought about the mental life” which includes philosophical and theological reflection on the functioning of the human psyche. Dixon (2003), p.12.

the separate fields of Jonathan Edwards studies and the philosophy of emotions, there has been almost no attempt to bring the two discussions together for a deeper understanding of spiritual perception in contemporary scholarship. While there are a number of recent studies related to spiritual perception and modern epistemology, there is scarcely any major attempt to significantly update, revise or deepen Edwards' original theory by interacting with contemporary insights or developments within the philosophy of emotions.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the one exception to the above trend is Mark Talbot's essay on *Godly Emotions* where he attempts to further develop Edwards' notion of religious affections by explaining the relationship between beliefs, concerns and emotions.<sup>9</sup> In this way, he is trying to expand upon Edwards' account of spiritual perception by integrating it to a psychological model based loosely upon Robert Roberts' recent work on the emotions. However, even then, Talbot's essay remains severely limited in scope and depth. The integrative work with contemporary insights remains largely superficial and is only three pages long. Moreover, the understanding of the emotions presented there is nowhere as sophisticated as Roberts' own account. In fact, Talbot actually misunderstood Roberts' conception of the emotions and views them as "products of our beliefs and concerns" rather than Roberts' own understanding of emotions as concern-based construals which are not necessarily derived from beliefs and concerns.<sup>10</sup>

The dearth of scholarship at the intersection of Edwards' doctrine of spiritual perception and contemporary emotion research is rather surprising given the striking apparent affinities between Edwards' highly influential work on the religious affections and recent

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<sup>8</sup> Studies pertaining to spiritual perception and modern epistemology include: Nichols (2003); Plantinga (2000); Wainwright (1995).

<sup>9</sup> Talbot (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.236.

scholarly interest in religious emotions.<sup>11</sup> This is especially so considering that his original account is more than two hundred and fifty years old by now and there must be ways in which it could be updated and deepened in some aspects through insights gained via the explosion of modern psychological and philosophical research in the last century. Hence, part of the motivation in this dissertation is to fill that lacuna and bring the two disciplines into dialogue.

A dialogue between the two disciplines is much needed not only because Edwards' original theory could benefit from contemporary insights, but also because modern philosophical disciplines are often ignorant of the categories and concerns of Theology. Contemporary philosophical attempts to understand the nature of Christian spiritual formation often lack the theological sensitivity and depth that are characteristic of theological psychologies within the Christian tradition. For instance, Roberts' recent work on "spiritual emotions", while an insightful philosophical treatment on the nature of emotions and their bearing on the Christian life, is however rather bare on the theological description of spiritual emotions.<sup>12</sup> Little connection is made to the central theological categories of Christology, Pneumatology, Soteriology and Trinitarian theology. Contrast this with Edwards' theologically rich and nuanced treatment of the "holy affections" in *The Religious Affections* or Augustine's theological psychology in *De Trinitate*. More significantly, Roberts' work does not make the kind of distinctions that are important to the theological tradition, such as distinctions between natural and supernatural emotions, finite and transcendent good, created and eschatological ends, common and regenerative grace. He seems to impose his philosophical model of emotions too hastily on the theological terrain without due

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<sup>11</sup> This interest is reflected in the recent flurry of publications that relate modern emotion research with religion which include "The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion" and two entire journal issues dedicated purely to this topic that appeared in *Faith and Philosophy* and *Modern Theology*. Nevertheless, there is not a single work in these publications that brings Edwards and contemporary emotion research into conversation. See: Coakley, ed. (2011a); Coakley, ed. (2011); Corrigan, ed. (2008).

<sup>12</sup> Roberts (2007).



consideration and reworking of his model in light of theological categories of thought. Roberts' work is not an isolated case in the literature. Other recent philosophically sophisticated works that address the issue of Christian religious psychology and transformation suffer from similar deficiencies.<sup>13</sup> Hence, it seems that there remains a need in contemporary scholarship for a treatment of the theological psychology of transforming grace that is both philosophically and theologically sensitive. The hope of this study is that by contemporising Edwards' sophisticated account of spiritual perception it can go some way to meeting that lack.

### 1.2 Method for Contemporising Spiritual Perception

The method employed for the task of contemporising spiritual perception is to examine the three fundamental components of Edwards' theory – infusion of grace, Scripture and spiritual delight – and consider how they could be further developed or revised in light of contemporary work in analytic philosophy, especially that of Robert Roberts. Despite our earlier criticism of Roberts' work, it cannot be denied that his groundbreaking discussion on the emotions remains highly influential and illuminating. Moreover, he is also one of the few academics who is not only immensely influential within contemporary philosophy of emotions but is also actively applying the fruits of his philosophical labour to understanding the psychology of Christian spirituality. In this regard, there is a significant convergence between his work and Edwards' thought on the 'holy affections' that allows them to be natural conversational partners. With this in mind, the majority of the study would hence be focused on an in-depth conversation between Edwards and Roberts with the aim of articulating a contemporary account of spiritual perception. In addition to Roberts, we will also engage with other secondary interlocutors whose work bears significance for our purpose.

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<sup>13</sup> Examples include the work of Adams (1999); Alston (1991); Wynn (2005).

Of particular note are the writings of Nicholas Wolterstorff and William Alston which highlight some important aspects of spiritual perception that are not explicitly addressed by our two primary interlocutors. Therefore, the method adopted for the study can be considered part of the ‘analytic theology’ approach rather than a strictly historical or exegetical one. That is to say, it seeks to bring the resources, tools and rhetorical style prevalent in contemporary analytic philosophy to bear on theological issues.<sup>14</sup> It is also for this reason that the decision has been made to label the account provided in this study as an ‘analytic theological psychology’ and that choice is reflected in the dissertation’s title.

It should be noted upfront that there are of course differing views on the nature and account of emotions in the current philosophical literature and the purpose of this study is not to defend Roberts’ account against its rivals. That in itself would be a major undertaking and has already been ably done elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Instead, our focus here is to utilise his account of emotions and the insights it provides to contemporise Edward’s doctrine of spiritual perception. Nevertheless, our choice of Roberts as the main conversational partner is not arbitrary either. One of the main reasons for utilising the work of Roberts is that his writings are probably the most developed and thorough reflection on Christian emotions within contemporary philosophy of emotions and would thus make a thoughtful dialogue partner with Edwards’ treatment of the religious affections and its closely related notion of spiritual perception. In addition, there is also a great amount of compatibility and potential synergy between their thinking. They both argue for a kind of perception in religious affectivity and share a common emphasis on the role of doctrine and Scripture in Christian affective perception. Moreover, they are also concerned for their account to be consistent with the

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Rea defines analytic theology as “the activity of approaching theological topics with the ambitions of an analytic philosopher and in a style that conforms to the prescriptions that are distinctive of analytic philosophical discourse. It will also involve, more or less, pursuing those topics in a way that engages the literature that is constitutive of the analytic tradition, employing some of the technical jargon from that tradition, and so on”. Rea (2009a), p.7.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Roberts (2003); Roberts (2010).

biblical data and the orthodox Christian tradition in general. Most significantly, Roberts' understanding of the emotions could potentially resolve some of the inherent problems with Edwards' account of spiritual perception as we shall see later. With all these affinities in their thinking, Roberts is hence arguably the most ideal contemporary philosopher of emotion to complement and modernise Edwards' fecund theological psychology and that is precisely what we are focused on doing in this study. However, before we can bring Roberts and Edwards into meaningful conversation, there are a few important preliminary clarifications and methodological issues that have to be addressed first.

### 1.3 Methodological Issues and Preliminary Remarks

#### 1.3.1 Edwards and Roberts in Conversation

Scholars of Edwards have often cautioned that Edwards' understanding of the affections is quite distinct from our modern notion of emotions.<sup>16</sup> This point has been well made in the recent work of Thomas Dixon in which he observes that the modern category of emotion as used in contemporary scholarship covers an incredibly wide range of mental phenomena and dispositions. It is a broad generic category that emerged in the eighteenth century to gradually replace the more fine-grained and religiously oriented notions of affections, passions and sentiments that were commonplace in Edwards' time.<sup>17</sup> There is hence a difference as to what precisely is being referred to by the different terms.

The cautionary note by many Edwards scholars is well-taken. It must be acknowledged that there is no consensus in modern scholarship as to what precisely an emotion is. The term 'emotion' is rather ambiguous within the literature and could potentially cover a wide range of psychological states and dispositions. However, it does not imply that

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<sup>16</sup> See for instance, McClymond and McDermott (2012), p.313.

<sup>17</sup> Dixon (2003), pp.13-16.

there can be no meaningful conversation between the distinct categories of affections and emotions. The gap between the two can be bridged if we are careful to state what is meant by an emotion and which contemporary account of emotion we are appealing to. There are numerous distinct theories of emotion in current scholarship and not every one is compatible with Edwards' understanding of the affections; nevertheless, there are also accounts that are compatible, including Roberts'.

### 1.3.2 Roberts in Contemporary Philosophy of Emotions

To help us better understand the various conceptions of emotions in the contemporary discussion and Roberts' location within that conversation, it would be helpful to provide a brief survey of the main theories that are currently on offer. These theories can be roughly classified under two main groupings – feeling theories and cognitive theories. This classification is not meant to be as neat as it may suggest nor is it exhaustive. Many of the accounts are highly complex and resist such clear cut demarcation. Nevertheless, it does serve as a helpful tentative guide into the literature.

#### 1.3.2.1 Feeling Theories

The first group under consideration are feeling theories of emotion which view emotions as essentially a kind of feeling. One of the most influential versions of such a theory is proposed by William James according to which emotions consist of the feeling of certain physiological changes in the body that result from some stimulus.<sup>18</sup> Emotions, on this account, are hence simply bodily feelings. James' theory of emotion, however, has widely been seen to be problematic for a few reasons. First, as observed by John Deigh, such a stance

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<sup>18</sup> James (1884).

effectively makes emotions to be epiphenomenal.<sup>19</sup> When a person sees an engulfing flame, he feels fear and runs for the door. On James' account, the act of dashing for the door is not caused by an experience of fear towards the menacing fire, but instead, the bodily feeling of running and heart racing is itself the emotion. It is not the emotion that motivates or causes the running but the mere fact of seeing an engulfing fire. The emotion is epiphenomenal. Most philosophers, however, would want to avoid this conclusion as it seems apparent that emotions do motivate actions. The second problem with James' account is that while bodily feelings seem to lack intentionality<sup>20</sup>, emotions apparently are intentional in nature.<sup>21</sup> Feelings of physiological changes such as an increased pulse rate and the tensing of one's muscle do not seem to be about or directed at anything, at least not objects (real or imagined) external to one's body. They are not intentional in the way that our beliefs or thoughts are. However, emotions appear to be more like thoughts than bodily feelings with respect to intentionality. Our emotions of fear are directed toward certain objects or situations and we could explain what they are about. They hence seem to be intentional in the way bodily feelings are not and therefore cannot be identical with them. Finally, feeling theories of emotion in the Jamesian tradition also face the difficulty of individuation. On the Jamesian account, emotions are individuated on the basis of the distinctive feel of the physiological changes. However, as highlighted by Ronald De Sousa, experimental research conducted by Stanley Schacter and Jerome Singer seem to have contradicted this claim.<sup>22</sup> Instead, it points to the conclusion that bodily feelings are often inadequate and even irrelevant in differentiating between specific emotions in subjects.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Deigh (2010), p.21.

<sup>20</sup> The term 'intentionality' is typically used in the philosophy of mind to denote the directedness of mental states, what the state is about or directed at.

<sup>21</sup> Deigh (2010), pp.24-25.

<sup>22</sup> De Sousa (2010).

<sup>23</sup> Schacter and Singer (1962).

Due to the significant problems facing the classic Jamesian account, contemporary proponents of the bodily feeling theory of emotions typically modify the original position of James in an attempt to circumvent the issues raised. These modified accounts are usually labeled “neo-Jamesian” in the literature and are often represented by scholars whose work are inspired by modern research in neuroscience and evolutionary biology. Examples of prominent contemporary neo-Jamesians would include Antonio Damasio<sup>24</sup>, Jenefer Robinson<sup>25</sup> and Jesse Prinz<sup>26</sup>. These theorists attempt to retain James’ fundamental point that emotions are essentially constituted by physiological feelings. However, they also seek to rehabilitate his position by arguing that these feelings can possess intentionality.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, not everyone is convinced that the moves to introduce the appropriate kind of intentionality to bodily feelings are ultimately successful.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the underlying neo-Jamesian commitment to understand emotions as a kind of bodily feeling remains counterintuitive to our experience. On the neo-Jamesian view, it remains that for a person who experiences joy and lifts up his arms as he perceives his sports team winning a vital match, the feeling of the physiological movements of the arms is itself the joyous emotion. Yet, this appears to reverse the order of explanation. It seems more accurate to describe the movement of the arms as an expression of joy rather than joy itself. Indeed, joy can be physically expressed in numerous distinct ways, such as running in circles, smashing the table or bursting into tears. There does not seem to be an adequate and principled way of classifying one particular set of physiological changes and its accompanying bodily feeling as a specific emotion.

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<sup>24</sup> Damasio (1995).

<sup>25</sup> Robinson (2005).

<sup>26</sup> Prinz (2004).

<sup>27</sup> For instance, see *ibid.*, pp.52-78.

<sup>28</sup> For a criticism of the kind of intentionality neo-Jamesians attribute to bodily feelings, see Deigh (2010), pp.35-37.

### 1.3.2.2 Cognitive Theories

The major and dominant alternative to the neo-Jamesian camp is the cognitivist position. Unlike the Jamesian tradition which sees bodily feelings as essential to emotions, cognitivists typically take emotions to be centrally a kind of intentional cognitive state or disposition towards such states that are not necessarily constituted by or reducible to bodily feelings. By the term ‘cognitive’, theorists in this camp meant to characterise emotions as a function of cognition. That is to say, they are not cognitively impenetrable brute facts but are to some extent reason sensitive, intelligible, meaningful and intentional. Moreover, their cognitive nature also renders them susceptible to being influenced by other cognitive states such as beliefs and allows them to be subjected to certain normative evaluations. Hence, cognitivists such as Patricia Greenspan<sup>29</sup> and Gabriele Taylor<sup>30</sup> argue that emotions can be said to be rational or irrational, appropriate or inappropriate.

The cognitivist camp covers a wide spectrum of views and ranges from strong or pure cognitivists on one extreme to mild cognitivists on the other. Strong cognitivists maintain that the intentional objects of emotions are propositional in nature. On this view, emotions are hence a kind of propositional attitude, a stance or attitude that one adopts towards certain propositions. The most influential strong cognitivist positions in modern discussion are those that follow the Stoic tradition<sup>31</sup> of identifying emotions with a kind of evaluative judgment and have among them prominent contemporary supporters such as Robert Solomon<sup>32</sup>, Martha Nussbaum<sup>33</sup> and Jerome Neu<sup>34</sup>. However, such positions seem too extreme for many scholars. In particular, it has trouble accounting for emotions among infants and animals. Presumably,

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<sup>29</sup> Greenspan (1988).

<sup>30</sup> Taylor (1985).

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed exploration of the Stoic understanding of emotions as a species of judgment, see Graver (2007).

<sup>32</sup> Solomon (1993), pp.125-131.

<sup>33</sup> Nussbaum (2001).

<sup>34</sup> Neu (2000).

animals and babies are capable of experiencing emotions such as fear and excitement but yet lack the linguistic and cognitive capacity to form abstract concepts and propositional thoughts. Therefore, strong cognitivists posit too high a cognitive requirement for emotions than is actually the case.

Moving away from the extreme of strong cognitivism are milder cognitive theories that allow for the intentional content of emotions to be non-propositional or even unconscious in nature while still affirming that emotions are a function of cognition. An influential view among the weaker cognitivist variants is the cognitive appraisal theory which takes emotions to involve a kind of complex pattern of appraisal that is at least partly cognitive in nature. Such an approach, popular with empirical psychologists, follows in the footsteps of Magda Arnold's seminal work on the appraisal process and typically maintains that emotions are more appropriately described as a process rather than a particular mental state.<sup>35</sup> Like the strong cognitivists, cognitive appraisal theorists such as Ira Roseman<sup>36</sup>, Richard Lazarus<sup>37</sup> and Klaus Scherer<sup>38</sup> take cognitive operations of the mind to be necessary and essential to emotions. However, they also usually allow for non-cognitive and non-propositional elements to constitute part of the emotion process. Nevertheless, what remains central to an emotion and its principle of individuation is the evaluative appraisal which possesses a significant cognitive, even if non-propositional, dimension. Such appraisals are usually taken to be a kind of evaluation of the circumstances with respect to various major appraisal dimensions postulated by theorists, such as 'valence', 'certainty' and 'arousal'. Accordingly, emotions

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<sup>35</sup> Scherer and Ellsworth (2003), p.573. See also Arnold (1960).

<sup>36</sup> Roseman (2001).

<sup>37</sup> Lazarus (1991).

<sup>38</sup> Scherer (2001).



are hence understood as simply the pattern or “combination” of such appraisals along the lines of these major dimensions.<sup>39</sup>

Cognitive appraisal theories have received their share of criticism in the literature and are seen to suffer from several problems.<sup>40</sup> First, appraisals do not seem to sufficiently characterise the nature of an emotion. Cognitive appraisal of a situation in terms of the various appraisal dimensions can often be done in a cold calculating manner that does not involve any emotion. Hence, it seems that appraisals in themselves are not sufficient for the formation of emotions. Second, in the case of clinical phobia such as arachnophobia, one could judge and appraise that spiders are non-threatening yet continue to experience extreme fear in their presence. This seems to imply that our overall appraisal of a situation may at times contradict our emotions and thus cannot be identical or reducible to the latter.

Another position within the more moderate spectrum of the cognitive camp is the perceptual theory which sees emotions as having significant parallels with ordinary perception.<sup>41</sup> On this view, emotions are understood as providing a kind of mental framework for ‘seeing’ or perceiving a particular circumstance that makes various features of the situation salient to a person. Accordingly, emotions are not to be identified with or reduced to the cognitive state or process of judgments and appraisals. Instead, they are the affective perspective or framework in which such processes and states occur. Therefore, on this view, cognitive judgments and appraisals function under the influence of the underlying emotions rather than being equivalent to the emotions.

Roberts’ account of the emotions falls under the perceptual theory alongside other perceptualists such as Ronald De Sousa<sup>42</sup> and Amelie Rorty<sup>43</sup>. These theorists differ in the

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<sup>39</sup> Scherer and Ellsworth (2003), p.586.

<sup>40</sup> For criticisms of the cognitive appraisal theory, see: Parkinson (1997); McEachrane (2009).

<sup>41</sup> These parallels are explored later in chapter two.

<sup>42</sup> De Sousa (1980), p.137.

way they understand the perceptual nature of emotions and their relationship with cognition. In describing his view, Roberts characterises it as “mildly cognitive” and distinguishes his position from strong cognitivism in two important ways.<sup>44</sup> First, he argues that some of our emotional perceptions can be internally structured by concepts and propositions even if we are unaware or unable to articulate what the concepts and propositions are. This point allows Roberts to affirm that emotions and their inherent perceptual organisation can be structured propositionally and conceptually (thereby being dependent on cognitive functioning) even when the subject is not consciously or explicitly entertaining any thoughts that pertain to those propositions and concepts throughout the emotion process. Second, Roberts also allows that the intentional content of emotions need not be constituted by actual “explicit propositions”, but merely insists that the content be “susceptible of reasonably accurate propositional characterisation”.<sup>45</sup> This concession significantly lowers the minimum cognitive requirement of emotions and allows for the attribution of emotions to animals and infants, thus circumventing one of the problems plaguing the judgmental theory.

#### 1.3.2.3 Other Theories

Besides the Jamesian and cognitive camps, there are other positions that do not fall neatly into either. One such prominent view is Peter Goldie’s account which seeks to recover the centrality of feelings in a theory of emotion.<sup>46</sup> Goldie argues that feelings can have intentionality and proceeds to distinguish between two kinds of intentional feelings that could constitute emotional feeling: bodily feelings and “feelings towards”. The former is directed towards the body while the latter towards the emotional object. Goldie, however, is not a Jamesian in that he does not necessarily equate emotions with bodily feelings, nor does he

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<sup>43</sup> Rorty (1978), p.150.

<sup>44</sup> Roberts (2003), p.111.

<sup>45</sup> Roberts (2010), p.572.

<sup>46</sup> Goldie (2000).

insist that feelings are essential for emotions.<sup>47</sup> He simply wants to give greater prominence to the role of feelings in a theory of emotion. Moreover, despite arguing for the intentionality of feelings, Goldie is also not a typical cognitivist in that he does not identify an emotion with any particular cognitive state, but sees it more as a “diachronic” disposition.<sup>48</sup> For our purpose, it is significant to note that Goldie’s account of emotion is not necessarily a rival theory that is contrary to Roberts’ view. His emphasis on the nature and role of feelings in emotions can be seen as compatible with what Roberts has to say.<sup>49</sup>

#### 1.4 Overview of the Following Chapters

Having addressed some of the methodological issues pertaining to the dissertation and the wider context for Roberts’ understanding of the emotions, we are now ready to proceed with our study. As mentioned earlier, the aim of this thesis is to modernise and expand upon Edwards’ original theory of spiritual perception in light of Roberts’ work and other related developments in contemporary philosophy and theology. With this in mind, the study will be organised along the following chapters as outlined below.

In chapter two, we will examine Edwards’ account of spiritual perception and consider its function as the psychological dimension of transforming grace in converting a person to faith in Jesus Christ. The purpose here is to explore how his theory can be further developed or revised through a conversation with Roberts to provide us with a general psychological account of converting grace. It is important to recognize that Edwards did not make a distinction between converting and sanctifying grace. For him, the same process of

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<sup>47</sup> Goldie (2002), p.235.

<sup>48</sup> Goldie (2010), pp.4-5.

<sup>49</sup> Despite some minor disagreements, Roberts is generally sympathetic to Goldie’s account. However, he thought that Goldie’s account of “feelings towards” was severely underdeveloped and sought to expand upon this concept from his own theory of emotion. For details, see Roberts (2001), pp.551-552.

spiritual perception underlies the two. This conflation, however, raises some serious theological difficulties for Edwards and it shall be argued that the distinction should be maintained. In making this differentiation, we will also have to revise our understanding of spiritual perception and adapt it to formulate an account for the theological psychology of converting grace that is distinct from sanctifying grace.

Edwards' original theory of spiritual perception is really more suited as an account for the psychology of sanctifying grace than converting grace. Hence, our discussion of spiritual perception as sanctifying grace would take up the majority and remainder of our study from chapter three to seven. These chapters are organised around the three main components of Edwards' theory – the infusion of grace, the content of Scripture, and spiritual delight. Each of these components plays a vital and distinct role in Edwards' overall theory and will be examined in conversation with Roberts and other related contemporary discussions.

We begin by focusing on the notion of infusion in chapter three and interact with the works of Edwards and William Alston for the purpose of explicating a philosophically oriented model for the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence within believers. The problems with Edwards' conception of infusion will be considered and a revised account that attempts to surmount the difficulties will also be given.

In chapter four and five, we proceed to the second major component of Edwards' theory of spiritual perception – the Christian Scripture. For Edwards, the concept of infusion is intimately related to the content of the Christian Scripture which he takes to be in some sense the words of God and Christ. According to him, Christians are infused with a new vital principle within the soul in order to perceive the excellency and beauty of the truth that Scripture proclaims, without which nothing can be perceived. For Edwards, it is such perceptions of the divine glory via Scripture and Spirit infusion that ultimately drive the

Christian life and serve as the foundation of true virtue. With this Edwardsean framework as our starting point, the aim in these two chapters is to consider the nature of the content of Scripture through the lens of contemporary discussions, beginning with its illocutionary content in chapter three and other non-illocutionary content in chapter four. It shall be argued that these elements which constitute Scripture's content, when sufficiently understood, afford her readers with an obligation and value laden vision of the world of the text and an affective experience of her central character, God.

In chapter six, we will cover the final major component of Edwards' theory which is spiritual delight. Edwards held that it is in spiritual delight that believers perceive and experience the goodness and beauty of God through the interaction of the infused Spirit and the content of Scripture. The purpose in this chapter is to examine this notion of spiritual delight and consider the ways in which two unsatisfactory aspects of Edwards' thinking on this area can be revised in light of our ongoing discussion. In addition, we will also address the issue of how spiritual delight serves to bring about love for God and the capacity to overcome temptation and sin.

After laying out how the three major aspects of spiritual perception could be contemporised, in the final chapter, we will consider three possible challenges to the account developed thus far. They are the challenge of human sin, divine hiddenness and divine transcendence. In light of our interactions with these problems, the contemporised account of spiritual perception will then be further nuanced and refined.

## **Chapter Two: Spiritual Perception and the Theological Psychology of Converting Grace**

### 2.1 Spiritual Perception in Contemporary Scholarship

Edwards' theory of spiritual perception has received much attention in contemporary scholarship and at the heart of that academic conversation is the fiercely debated issue of Edwards' relationship with English Philosopher John Locke. Perry Miller, in his seminal work more than half a century ago, takes Edwards to be so thoroughly influenced by Locke that his religious psychology is best understood as "puritanism recast in the idiom of empirical psychology."<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, Miller's Edwards is one who is increasingly dissatisfied with the rigid compartmentalization and rationalism of traditional Puritanism's faculty psychology and, in response, ventures in a completely new direction by building his theory of spiritual perception upon the sensational psychology of Locke.<sup>51</sup>

Miller's presentation of Edwards as an atypical Puritan who "acquired almost all his theoretical starting points" from Locke and Newton (both of whom Miller takes to be the overwhelming "dominating sources" for Edwards' psychology) has been profoundly influential for subsequent scholarship. In the wake of Miller's work, many scholars writing on Edwards' religious psychology have emphasised Locke's foundational influence on Edwards and sought to understand his 'sense of the heart' in Lockean terms. Hence, academics such as C.C. Goen<sup>52</sup>, Patricia Tracy<sup>53</sup>, Ava Chamberlain<sup>54</sup> and John E. Smith<sup>55</sup> continued with Miller's position of seeing Locke as an overwhelming influence on Edwards as well as the hermeneutical key to understanding his radical psychology. Although scholars

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<sup>50</sup> Miller (1949), p.62.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp.178-179. See also Miller (1948).

<sup>52</sup> Goen (1972).

<sup>53</sup> Tracy (1980).

<sup>54</sup> Chamberlain (2000).

<sup>55</sup> Smith (1974).

in this camp tend to moderate Miller's original thesis by noting the ways in which Edwards differs from Locke, they nevertheless largely agree that his understanding of spiritual perception is basically constructed upon Lockean psychology.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the influence of Miller's work, an alternate voice has also gradually emerged over the years to challenge his original thesis. Conrad Cherry, in his important 1966 publication, argues that Locke's philosophical categories are usually used by Edwards within the framework of the traditional Augustinian doctrines of illumination and infusion. Therefore, the traditional theological doctrines are more foundational than the Lockean concepts and terms he deploys.<sup>57</sup> Cherry sides with the conclusion of Paul Ramsey and affirms that it is a mistake "to reduce Jonathan Edwards' system to that of John Locke, while ignoring the traditional doctrine of infusion and not giving equal weight to his Augustinian doctrine of illumination".<sup>58</sup> Terrence Erdt added to that voice by highlighting the Calvinist roots of Edwards' psychology of the heart. He contends that Edwards' characterisation of spiritual perception in terms such as 'sense of the heart', 'sensible effects', 'inward sweetness' and 'beauty' is a Puritan commonplace and is by no means unique to Edwards.<sup>59</sup> In addition, he also criticises Miller's caricature of Puritan faculty psychology and its supposed excessive rationalism. He notes that the writings of Calvin and many Puritans clearly do not have the kind of rigidness and "ineradicable rationalism" that Miller attributes to them. Hence, Erdt concludes that Edwards could just as easily draw from the Calvinist and Puritan tradition in his articulation of spiritual perception.<sup>60</sup> Other scholars including Norman Fiering<sup>61</sup>, Paul

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, for instance, is careful to emphasise that Edwards is not a blind follower of Locke and displays his own intellectual independence in certain areas. Nevertheless, he thinks "one can say with confidence that Miller's view is on the whole accurate". Smith (1992), p.15.

<sup>57</sup> Cherry (1966), p.26.

<sup>58</sup> Ramsey (1957), p.43. Paul Ramsey as cited by Conrad Cherry in Cherry (1966), p.26.

<sup>59</sup> Erdt (1980), p.2.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp.2-3.

<sup>61</sup> Fiering (1981).

Helm<sup>62</sup>, James Hoopes<sup>63</sup>, Stephen Daniel<sup>64</sup> and David Laurence<sup>65</sup> have also voiced similar concerns over Miller's thesis. They reject the claim that Locke's empiricism was a dominating source and influence upon Edwards' thought and oppose the idea that his theory of spiritual perception was based primarily upon Locke's sensational psychology.

More recently, scholars have also sought to recover the traditional Puritan and biblical sources of Edwards' psychology. Significantly, Brad Walton in his historical study examines a wide range of Puritan literature from the sixteen and seventeen century and concludes that the supposed originality of Edwards' 'sense of the heart' has been entirely overstated by Miller and his supporters. He observes that "the individual concepts out of which Edwards constructs Religious Affections, although not previously presented in so systematically philosophical a manner, had already been, in all essentials, articulated, developed and exploited in seventeenth-century puritanism".<sup>66</sup> This Puritan tradition of thought would no doubt be available to Edwards and exert a significant influence in his thinking. Moreover, Miller's highly influential presentation of traditional Puritan faculty psychology's dichotomy of heart and head has also been called into question. Walton notes that many prior Puritans display the same kind of psychological unity of the heart in their writings and similarly appealed to the language of 'spiritual sense' to describe the "heart's special perception".<sup>67</sup> Therefore, Miller's argument that Edwards must have appealed to Lockean psychology to account for the originality and un-Puritan nature of his religious psychology must be seriously questioned.

On a related note, Karin Stetina's doctoral work examines Edwards' early writings and observes that even prior to his study of Locke, the young Edwards had already

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<sup>62</sup> Helm (1969).

<sup>63</sup> Hoopes (1989).

<sup>64</sup> Daniels (1994).

<sup>65</sup> Laurence (1980).

<sup>66</sup> Walton (2002), p.231.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.228.



formulated the basic concept of spiritual perception in terms of traditional biblical language.<sup>68</sup> Stetina's study is significant in that it focuses on the period of Edwards' life before his encounter with Locke and reveals the "formative impact Edwards' biblically grounded religious experiences had on his theology of religious experience".<sup>69</sup> She highlights the striking similarities the early writings share with his later works and argues that the primary basis of Edwards' theology of religious experience is his early understanding and personal experience of the scriptural truths as a biblically oriented pastor. In addition, she also makes the case that Edwards' usage of ideas from Calvin, Locke and Newton was merely his attempt of finding "analogical words" that could more clearly communicate the mysteries of Christianity<sup>70</sup>, but he never meant for them "to supersede the biblical concepts"<sup>71</sup> he was trying to explain.

In light of the scholarship since Miller's ground breaking work, the broad academic consensus today is that Miller had overstated the influence Locke had over Edwards. There is also an increasing acknowledgement that the more traditional sources of his thinking must also be given due recognition. Therefore, the interpretation of Edwards' theory of spiritual perception taken in our discussion here will also reflect the academic tradition that takes his psychology of the heart to be drawn first and foremost from the traditional Puritan and biblical sources. However, even then, the influence of Locke must not be dismissed altogether. Although Edwards' psychology may not have been influenced by Locke to the extent suggested by Miller, he nevertheless did find many of the ideas and concepts introduced by Locke to be helpful for the purpose of better explaining the mystery of religious experiences. This is evident in his appeal to some of Locke's technical language. However, he did not always use Lockean terms and concepts in the same way that Locke

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<sup>68</sup> Stetina (2011), pp.259-260.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.181.

<sup>71</sup> Stetina (2009), p.185.

did.<sup>72</sup> As noted by Cherry, for Edwards, the more traditional sources serve as the fundamental “framework” within which the Lockean concepts and terms were adapted and employed.<sup>73</sup>

## 2.2 Edwards’ Theory of Spiritual Perception

### 2.2.1 The Basic Shape of Edwardsean Psychology

The foregoing discussion on the relationship between Locke and Edwards provides us with an important orientation on how to interpret Edwards’ religious psychology. With that in mind, we will now proceed to examine his understanding of the subject. Edwards’ theory of spiritual perception is intimately related to his overall conception of human psychology. Hence, to adequately comprehend his theory, one must first be introduced to the basic shape of his psychology. Edwards subscribes to a bipartite model of human psychology whereby the human soul is divided into two basic capacities. Early on in *Religious Affections*, he observes that there are two powers or faculties within the human soul. The first is “understanding” which he ascribes to it the capacity for speculation and perception.<sup>74</sup> The second faculty is broadly thought of as “the inclination” which is the capacity for experiences of aversion or attraction that one has towards various ideas.

According to Edwards, the inclinations of the soul can be differentiated according to their intensity and the amount of control that one has over them. The more “vigorous and sensible exercises” of the inclinations are termed the “affections”, while the strongest and more “sudden” stirrings of the inclinations are known as the “passions”.<sup>75</sup> In addition, passions and affections also differ in the level of control the subject has over them. The

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<sup>72</sup> For details of the main differences, see Walton (2002), pp.206-219.

<sup>73</sup> Cherry (1966), p.26.

<sup>74</sup> WJE 2:96.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp.96, 98.

passions, being the most “violent” exercises of the inclination, tend to be more overpowering for the subject and are thus less under the control or command of the subject than affections are.<sup>76</sup>

The two basic faculties of understanding and inclination are foundational for Edwards and he derives other important psychological concepts from them, one of these being the “will”. The “will”, in Edwards’ writings, is used in several distinct ways. In the narrow sense, it is simply a synonym for the inclination.<sup>77</sup> In the broader sense, “will” extends beyond the inclination to encompass the generation of the choices and actions of a subject.<sup>78</sup> Taken in this broad sense, Edwards conceives of the “will” as the fount and spring of one’s actions, choices and affections, where these elements are “determined and governed”<sup>79</sup> by the inclination.

The notion of the “will” is intimately related to another important psychological concept in Edwards’ thinking, the “heart”. Similar to the “will”, the “heart” is also used in several distinct ways by Edwards. In one sense, it is simply another term for the “inclination” or “will” (in either the broad or narrow sense).<sup>80</sup> The more significant sense of the term is his usage of it to describe the functioning of the “mind” with respect to the faculty of inclination.<sup>81</sup> The “mind”, on Edwards’ anthropology, does not merely refer to the intellect or speculative powers of the soul. It is a broad term for the general human psyche or mentality and its related mental capacity. This mental capacity can function in a way that is purely speculative or notional, engaging only the faculty of understanding and not the inclination in its operation. Alternatively, it can also function in a way that incorporates the inclination and

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>77</sup> An example of this narrow sense is found in: *ibid.*, p.272.

<sup>78</sup> An example of this broader sense is found in: *ibid.*, p.254.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.96.

<sup>80</sup> See, for instance, *ibid.*, p.255. See also WJE 1:325.

<sup>81</sup> WJE 2:96.

understanding. This latter inclinational functioning of the mind is what Edwards calls the “heart”.<sup>82</sup>

It is important to note that the distinction Edwards makes between understanding and inclination is only conceptual in nature and is not meant to compartmentalise the human psyche into strictly distinct faculties and parts. This is most evident in his conception of the heart as we have just described. The heart is the operation of the mind that brings together the faculty of understanding and inclination in functional unity.<sup>83</sup> It is also often used as a term to describe a kind of psychological disposition that is constituted by certain fundamental or deep-seated inclinations and the understanding of the whole human self. Therefore, although Edwards’ psychological model can be described as bipartite in nature, these conceptual distinctions do not ultimately compartmentalise the human person into distinct parts and functions, nor do they ultimately dichotomise the affections against the intellect as some commentators such as Ola Winslow<sup>84</sup> and Alfred Aldridge<sup>85</sup> have claimed. Rather, as observed by McClymond, Edwards held that “ultimately all faculties cohere with one another within the unity of the human self.”<sup>86</sup>

### 2.2.2 Edwardsean Epistemology

Edwards’ notion of the heart brings us to the focus of our exploration – his understanding of the “sense of the heart” and the “spiritual sense”. However, before we get into that, a brief introduction to his overall Locke influenced epistemology is required.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.272. See also "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17:413-414.

<sup>83</sup> WJE 2:272.

<sup>84</sup> Winslow (1961), p.216.

<sup>85</sup> Aldridge (1964), p.22.

<sup>86</sup> McClymond (2008), p.407.

According to Locke, all human knowledge is derived from ideas in the form of sensations or reflections. He was against the notion of ‘innate ideas’ and did not think that the human mind is capable of any ideas on its own. Rather, he viewed the mind as a blank slate which is gradually furnished with simple ideas via one’s tangible experience of the world through his or her sense organs.<sup>87</sup> For Locke, the mind is impressed with simple ideas of sensation only when it acquires a sensation through sensory experience. Hence, new simple ideas of sensations can only be had in a new sensory experience.

Besides ideas of sensations, Locke also allows for simple ideas of reflection which are acquired through the mind’s reflection upon its own mental operations. Thus, the mind is able to have simple ideas such as love and hatred because the mind is able to perceive and experience itself and its own operations of loving and hating. Locke held that the manner in which one acquires a simple idea of reflection is very similar to that of an idea of sensation, with the main difference being that ideas of reflections are not acquired through one’s sense organs. Nevertheless, in perceiving and experiencing the mind’s own operations, there is an analogous “internal sense” that allows an individual to experience the processes of the mind, thereby producing various simple ideas of reflection.<sup>88</sup>

Locke maintained that ideas are the direct objects of the mind and that all human knowledge comprises of ideas that can be broken down to either simple ideas of sensation or reflection acquired via experience. These simple ideas form the basic building blocks of the mind’s content from which more complex ideas are derived. According to Locke, the human mind is incapable of generating its own original simple ideas and can only possess them through a tangible sensory experience of the world or an experience of the mind’s own operations.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Lockean simple ideas are ideas of the most basic kind from which more complex ideas are derived. Cf. Locke (1975), p.II.2.2.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.II.1.4.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.II.2.2.

Edwards was partly influenced by Locke's psychology. However, as mentioned earlier, it is important not to overstate Locke's influence. Edwards adopted certain aspects of Locke's theory and adapted it for his own doctrinal use. He did not follow Locke's epistemology on every point; nevertheless, he largely agreed with Locke that human knowledge is mostly constituted by simple ideas which cannot be generated by the mind on its own, but can only be acquired via experience.<sup>90</sup> However, unlike Locke, he does not think that the "internal sense"<sup>91</sup> arises from reflection upon one's own mental operations, but from the repetition of those very operations in the mind.<sup>92</sup> Hence, the experience of the internal sensation of divine beauty or holiness requires the mind to be in some extent capable of repeating the same mental operations from which the internal feeling or sensation arises. This capacity for repetition would in turn require the mind to have the appropriate "internal disposition" to perform those operations repeatedly whenever the associated simple ideas are in the mind.<sup>93</sup>

### 2.2.3 Sense of the Heart and the Spiritual Sense

Edwards' conception of the "internal sense" is intimately related to his notion of "the heart", and they ultimately come together in his understanding of the "sense of the heart" and the "spiritual sense". Many commentators tend to conflate the "sense of the heart" with the "spiritual sense", taking them to be conceptually equivalent. However, as noted by James Hoopes, there is a distinction between them: the former is a broader category that encompasses the latter.<sup>94</sup> The heart as the inclinational functioning of the mind incorporates the faculties of inclination and understanding, and results in a kind of "sensible knowledge".

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<sup>90</sup> See for instance his discussion in *Misc* 123 and 782. See: WJE 13:286-287. WJE 18:452-454.

<sup>91</sup> WJE 13:287.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.353.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.286-287.

<sup>94</sup> Hoopes (1983), p.857.

Sensible knowledge, in the context of Edwards' theory of spiritual perception, is a type of knowledge that involves the manifestation of the "pleasedness or displeasedness" of the inclination towards various ideas in the form of a certain internal experiential sensation or inward feeling in the understanding. It is also called a "sense of the heart" because it is an internal sense or sensation that arises from the heart as the inclinational operation of the mind, and it embodies the practical value, significance and importance the object has for the subject.<sup>95</sup>

The sense of the heart, according to Edwards' major essay in *Miscellanies* 782, is generally available to all humans since the human mind naturally has the capacity to incorporate the inclination in its functioning.<sup>96</sup> However, there is a particular class of sensible knowledge pertaining to divine realities which cannot be had naturally. Edwards held that the natural inclinations and dispositions of the soul, especially in their fallen state, are not appropriately aligned with divine or spiritual realities and therefore cannot afford an experience of "a due sense of those things".<sup>97</sup> This appropriate sensible knowledge of the heart regarding spiritual realities is what he calls the "spiritual sense", and it could only be experienced through the Holy Spirit's work of infusing his spiritual nature into the human soul to create a new *sui generis* inclination in the will. This act of infusion is the Spirit's work of regeneration in the hearts of believers. Hence, the "spiritual sense" is also the internal sense of the regenerated heart, and it is a sense unavailable to hearts that are unregenerated by the Spirit's infusion.

It is important to clarify that Edwards does not mean to affirm that an unregenerated heart cannot have any sensible knowledge of spiritual realities (i.e., realities pertaining to God and his work) at all. He held that the unregenerate, especially with the aid of the Holy

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<sup>95</sup> WJE 18:460.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp.460-461.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.461.

Spirit “assisting” the natural faculties, can have a natural sense of the value of spiritual realities that are grounded in natural inclinations based upon natural self-love.<sup>98</sup> This natural sense of spiritual realities is a sensible knowledge of the value of God and his work that is derived from the satisfaction or frustration of the natural tendency of self-love operative within all human beings in general.<sup>99</sup> The natural sense, however, is not equivalent to the “spiritual sense”. The former can only provide one with a sensible knowledge of the “natural good and evil” of the things of religion, that is, the value of divine realities as it bears upon purely natural human appetites and self-love. The “spiritual sense”, on the other hand, provides a person with a sensible knowledge of the “spiritual good” of the things of religion, that is, the value of divine realities as it bears upon supernatural or spiritual appetites and the principle of divine love infused within the human heart.<sup>100</sup> Edwards maintains that the natural sense is not opposed to the spiritual sense. He affirms that the natural sense could play an important role in preparing a person to experience the spiritual sense. Nevertheless, they are also fundamentally distinct and irreducible to one another. The natural and spiritual senses of the value of divine realities differ not only in their source (natural and supernatural) but also in the kind of value that is embodied in them. The latter is a *sui generis* experiential sensation that conveys the “beauty”, “glory”, “sweetness”, “wonderfulness” and “spiritual excellency” of God’s holiness in a way that cannot be done by the former.<sup>101</sup>

#### 2.2.4 Spiritual Sense as Spiritual Perception

Having examined Edwards’ understanding of the spiritual sense, we will now consider the relationship between such a sense and spiritual perception. The spiritual sense of

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.463.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.462.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp.462-463.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp.464-465.



the heart is often likened to a kind of perception by Edwards due to the similarities and analogous features that it shares with ordinary sense perception. Among these similarities are the qualities of sensibility, representational character and immediacy. We will consider each of these characteristics, beginning with the sensible quality of the spiritual sense.

#### 2.2.4.1 Sensibility

Edwards frequently describes the objects of the new spiritual sense as distinct ideas that involve a kind of delight or pleasure sensation and pertain most paradigmatically to the excellences of God. However, they could also extend to ideas in opposition to the excellences of God, such as ideas of sin and evil, in which case they would involve a kind of displeasure or sensation of pain. Yet, the most important and fundamental idea that the spiritual sense is directed at is the idea of true beauty which, for Edwards, is the beauty of God, or what he often calls “the beauty of holiness”<sup>102</sup>. The idea of true beauty is, according to him, a new “simple idea”<sup>103</sup> which like other simple ideas, such as ‘red’ or ‘round’, has an irreducible sensational character that cannot be had by mixing, reorganising or compounding other ideas.

Edwards conceives of the spiritual sense in some ways as functioning in an analogous manner to our natural sense perception faculties. Through our natural perceptual faculties, we are capable of knowing something for ourselves by way of sensing them, such as experiencing the sourness of lemon through our sense of taste by which we come to acquire the simple idea of ‘sour’. In an analogous fashion, spiritual perception allows us a unique way of knowing divine realities for ourselves by granting us an experiential sensation

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<sup>102</sup> WJE 2:260.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.205.

regarding the delightfulness and “sweetness” of divine holiness and thereby acquiring a new simple idea of true beauty.

As alluded to earlier, the sensing of divine holiness in sweet spiritual delight is distinct from merely grasping intellectual descriptions of holiness or even a natural sense of the things of religion. There is an irreducible sensibility to the experience of divine holiness in the form of delight that is lacking in merely grasping an intellectual description of it. In contemporary parlance, one could say that spiritual perception provides a person with a unique kind of knowledge by acquaintance through its sensibility in the form of a *sui generis* kind of delight, as opposed to merely propositional knowledge or any other natural sense of the heart.<sup>104</sup> It is through such a sensational experience of supernatural or spiritual delight that one acquires a new simple idea regarding the true beauty of God.

#### 2.2.4.2 Objective Representation

It would, however, be mistaken to thereby conclude that spiritual delight is thus merely a subjective feeling of “sweetness”. It is important for Edwards that such sensations of spiritual delight are not merely subjective but are also objectively grounded in the true nature of the divine being. Hence, the idea of true beauty functions as a genuine representation of the way the divine being actually is.<sup>105</sup> For this reason, Edwards again uses the term ‘perception’ to characterise the nature of the new spiritual sense. Like ordinary sense perceptions, spiritual perceptions do not merely present to us the content of our own minds but are representations of the object of perception. Yet, unlike ordinary sense perceptions,

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp.259-260.

<sup>105</sup> "The Nature of True Virtue," in WJE 8:622.

spiritual perception does not grasp the physical features of the object; instead, what is apprehended is the excellency and beauty of God and his divine works.<sup>106</sup>

#### 2.2.4.3 Immediacy and Intellectual Content

Another reason why spiritual delight or sense is considered a kind of perception for Edwards is because of the immediacy of the delight or pleasure in one's idea of true beauty. The pleasantness of the idea of true beauty comes to one not through a process of inference, argumentation or ratiocination, but immediately and directly just as one would in ordinary sense perception. For instance, our experience of the sweetness of honey through tasting it is immediate and direct and is not derived from inference or reasoning.<sup>107</sup> Analogously, Edwards held that the regenerate's mind is able to experience such perceptual-like immediate pleasing sensation and come to acquire the simple idea of true beauty.

There is, however, an important dis-analogy between ordinary sense perception and spiritual sense perception. Whereas one could experience the taste of honey without having any notion or intellectual grasp of honey, Edwards is insistent that the sensation of spiritual delight involved in spiritual perception necessarily involves intellectual or propositional content.<sup>108</sup> In this regard, spiritual delight is not merely affective but also possesses an intellectual aspect. According to him, spiritual perception uses the intellectual content of Scripture and doctrine to enable a person to experience the immediate sensation of the excellency of God. Without this content nothing can be perceived.<sup>109</sup> Yet, he is also quick to insist that intellectual content in itself is not sufficient for one's perception of divine goodness. Edwards wants to maintain the distinction between the notions or intellectual content

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<sup>106</sup> "Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17:413.

<sup>107</sup> "True Virtue," in WJE 8:619-620.

<sup>108</sup> WJE 2:266-268.

<sup>109</sup> "Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17:416.

pertaining to divine reality and one's sense of the reality's excellency.<sup>110</sup> For him, the true basis of spiritual perception is not our natural human faculties. This is why a mere intellectual grasp of the notions or propositions of doctrine with natural reason, although necessary for spiritual perception, is not sufficient for it. Spiritual perception of true beauty in delightful sensation is a gift from God and is a power of perception that derives "immediately from the Spirit of God".<sup>111</sup> Its proper cause is the Holy Spirit; nevertheless, it is a Spirit derived power that utilises intellectual and propositional content for the perception of divine excellency. Therefore, spiritual perception is not merely a non-cognitive affective feeling of delight. It is a kind of cognitive perception of divine goodness by the Spirit regenerated heart that involves intellectual content in the faculty of understanding and an immediate sensation of spiritual pleasure that arises from the infused spiritual inclination.

#### 2.2.5 Spiritual Perception and the Natural Faculties

The foregoing discussion highlights some of the important features spiritual perception shares with ordinary perception and the reason for taking the spiritual sense as a kind of perception in Edwards' thinking. It should be noted that the relationship between ordinary natural perception and spiritual perception is quite complex in Edwards' writings, and there are some differing views in the secondary literature regarding the continuity and discontinuity between spiritual perception and the natural human faculties. On one hand, scholars such as Paul Helm<sup>112</sup>, James Hoopes<sup>113</sup> and David Lyttle<sup>114</sup> advocate for the discontinuous view and see the capacity for spiritual perception and the experience it affords as grounded upon a new faculty or "sixth sense" that is fundamentally unlike any natural

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp.416-417.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.416.

<sup>112</sup> Helm (1969), pp.59-60.

<sup>113</sup> Hoopes (1983), p.859.

<sup>114</sup> Lyttle (1966), pp.50-59.

human faculty.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, commentators such as Cherry and Sang Hyun Lee have argued for a more continuous position that takes spiritual perception not as the result of a new faculty but as the natural faculties functioning in a new way through a new spiritual foundation or basis laid in the soul.<sup>116</sup>

The continuous position is arguably closer to Edwards' own position.<sup>117</sup> However, as noted by McClymond, continuity and discontinuity must both be emphasised since they are both present in his theory.<sup>118</sup> The infusion of the Spirit does not create a completely new faculty or sixth sense. It merely instils a supernatural inclination within the natural faculty of the will. Hence, the same faculty of the will continues to be utilised in spiritual perception even while accommodating a new supernatural inclination within.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, the act of infusion does result in a new simple idea in the faculty of understanding. The infused inclination allows the regenerate to grasp various religious ideas in the understanding with a distinctive spiritual delight that is unavailable to the natural or unregenerate man. This delight is a *sui generis* sensation and generates a new simple idea which is then integrated into more complex religious ideas to form a new whole that is available only to the regenerate.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, for Edwards, the experience of spiritual delight has epistemic significance since it transforms the ideas in the minds of believers in such a way that the regenerate and unregenerate ultimately do not share the same ideas about God. Hence, on this Edwardsean way of thinking, the natural human faculties are employed in spiritual perception, but they are also functioning from a supernaturally empowered inclination that illuminates the ideas of the understanding to a new appearance of divine glory that they never could possess naturally.

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<sup>115</sup> The term "sixth sense" is coined by Helm in Helm (1969), pp.59-60.

<sup>116</sup> Cherry (1966), p.30. Lee (1988), pp.153-154.

<sup>117</sup> The key text that supports this view is: "Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17:416.

<sup>118</sup> McClymond (1998), p.21.

<sup>119</sup> WJE 2:206.

<sup>120</sup> Edwards held that the regenerate's idea of God is partly constituted by simple ideas gained through the "internal sense and experience" of spiritual delight. These simple ideas are what differentiate the regenerate's from the unregenerate's idea of God. See *Misc 123* for Edwards' exposition on his theory of spiritual sight. WJE 13:286-287.

In summation, in providing an account of spiritual perception, Edwards is essentially concerned with characterising the distinct kind of knowledge the regenerate have regarding God and his redemptive work. It is fundamentally, for him, the regenerated heart functioning epistemically to experience, perceive or sense the goodness of God's holiness in spiritual delight. The heart regenerated by the Spirit of God is the inclinational functioning of the mind that incorporates the faculty of understanding furnished with the great truths of the gospel and the faculty of inclination infused with a new spiritual or supernatural inclination. When the regenerated heart functions in such an inclinational manner, it also functions epistemically to sense the glory of God in spiritual delight. Hence, spiritual perception is ultimately the non-inferential (or immediate) experience of the goodness of spiritual realities in a kind of *sui generis* sensible spiritual delight that represents the objective divine glory when the regenerated heart functions in such an epistemic way.

### 2.3 Wainwright's Criticism of Edwards' Theory

It should be obvious by now that the notion of delight is central to Edwards' theory of spiritual perception and his overall theological psychology of grace. Indeed, he sees it as a sure sign for genuine saving grace.<sup>121</sup> For Edwards, delight in God for his own intrinsic holiness is the central psychological manifestation of grace and is what separates the regenerate from the unregenerate. This particular way of conceiving grace's psychological dimension is of course not original to Edwards. The roots are much deeper in the Christian tradition that stretches back to at least Augustine's very influential conception of grace.<sup>122</sup> Hence, in making delight a central psychological feature of grace, Edwards is merely following a long tradition in the Christian faith. For Augustine, as it is for Edwards, the

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<sup>121</sup> "True Grace, Distinguished from the Experience of Devils," in WJE 25:633-634.

<sup>122</sup> For an examination of the role of inner spiritual delight in the thought of Augustine, see Cary (2008).

fundamental psychological manifestation of grace is the capacity to behold the great beauty of God in supernatural delight and love.<sup>123</sup> What is unique in Edwards' account is his selective usage of certain aspects of Lockean psychology (including the Lockean categories of sensations and ideas) to further develop that tradition. However, such an innovation is not without its problems.

William Wainwright has pointed out that Edwards' utilisation of Lockean psychology for his theory of spiritual perception faces a significant difficulty. As mentioned earlier, Edwards takes spiritual delight to be a kind of pleasure sensation that is also somehow cognitive in nature. That is to say, he conceives of spiritual pleasure sensation not merely as a subjective feeling but also as a true representation of something external, namely the divine excellency. The problem with such a move, as Wainwright has noted, is that it is hard to see how an internal pleasure sensation can also be a true representation of something external. Edwards often describes spiritual delight or affection as a kind of passive<sup>124</sup> simple sensation or idea.<sup>125</sup> According to him, simple ideas are discrete conscious phenomena not constituted by any parts and from which "nothing can be abstracted".<sup>126</sup> In addition, such sensations are also internal in nature. They are a kind of simple and discrete inward feelings or sensations that are not aspects of more complex conscious phenomena.

The discrete and internal nature of spiritual sensation is problematic for spiritual perception. As argued by Wainwright, discrete sensations of pleasures and pains "do not

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<sup>123</sup> Augustine conceives of grace primarily as the shedding of the love of God (i.e., the Holy Spirit) in the hearts of believers. The chief effect of that outpouring of divine love is delight in God. See, *The Spirit and the Letter*, 5.

<sup>124</sup> Edwards views sensations as passive in the sense of involuntary. It was noted by Wainwright that the passivity of sensations was a commonplace position in Edwards' time and is at one with the views of Locke and Hutcheson. Wainwright (1995), p.27.

<sup>125</sup> For instance, see WJE 2:113. and "True Virtue," in WJE 8:619. See also "The Mind," in WJE 6:102.

<sup>126</sup> "Mind," in WJE 6:361. The simple and discrete nature of simple ideas can also be inferred from Edwards' claim that simple ideas are such that "if you take anything that belongs to them you take all". See *ibid.*, p.360.

seem to point beyond themselves”.<sup>127</sup> They are in the mind and do not ‘belong’ to the external objects. If so, how is it then possible for a discrete internal pleasure sensation to also be a “true representation of something existing without”? How could it function as an “apparent cognition”?<sup>128</sup> Leon Chai raises a similar difficulty and questions how it is possible for spiritual knowledge with its intellectual and propositional character to be “conveyed by something equivalent to sensation”.<sup>129</sup>

In addition to the concerns raised by Wainwright and Chai, simple internal sensations also face the related difficulty of being unable to bear the kind of intrinsic intentionality that Edwards attributes to spiritual delight. Spiritual delight and religious affections are frequently described by Edwards as being directed at God or ideas of God and his holiness. Furthermore, the saint’s delight is said to be in God and their joy is intrinsically about him.<sup>130</sup> However, simple internal sensations cannot be intentional in this way. Simple internal sensations are not intentional in the same way that mental states such as beliefs and thoughts are. The latter are intrinsically directed at various external states of affairs or objects in a way the former are not. A simple discrete internal sensation of pleasure and pain, such as a sensation of a toothache, is not intrinsically directed at anything beyond itself, but an emotion of joy in God is. Hence, religious affections of spiritual delight are more akin to mental states such as thoughts and beliefs than simple internal sensations.

With regard to the above point, Edwards’ account basically faces a similar difficulty that many neo-Jamesian theories of emotions encounter – that is, neo-Jamesians are unable to attribute the right kind of intentionality to bodily feelings. Certain bodily feelings may be intentional in the sense of being indicative of a certain state of affairs. For instance, the bodily

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<sup>127</sup> Wainwright (1995), p.25.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Chai (1998), p.33.

<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, WJE 2:249, 108. See also "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in WJE 4:453.



feeling of a toothache may be indicative of excessive candy consumption. However, such a feeling or sensation is not intrinsically directed at that state of affairs in the same way mental states such as thoughts, beliefs and emotions potentially could.<sup>131</sup> Edwards' theory suffers from the same problem of intentionality. Simple internal sensations cannot bear intrinsic intentionality; consequently, his characterisation of spiritual delight as a simple sensation that is intrinsically directed towards external divine realities runs into an unresolvable internal tension.

The difficulties with Edwards' theory of spiritual perception are due significantly to his partial reliance on Locke's sensationalist psychology. However, there are better theoretical grounds upon which his theory can be constructed. In particular, Edwards could avoid the above criticisms by taking spiritual delight to be an emotion in the sense conceived by Roberts rather than as a simple internal sensation or idea, and still retain much of its defining characteristics. For the remainder of the chapter our focus will be to consider how the Edwardsean conception of saving grace as spiritual delight can be articulated in terms of Roberts' account of emotions rather than the Locke inspired categories of sensations and ideas. In doing so, we are also moving away from Edwards' own position on this issue and towards a synthesised account that integrates Edwardsean spiritual delight with a contemporary account of emotions. Hence, it is to Roberts' account of emotions that we shall now turn to.

#### 2.4 Roberts and the Nature of Emotions

In his influential work on the philosophy of emotions, Roberts argues that emotions are concern-based construals. A construal, on his account, is a "perceptual event or state in

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<sup>131</sup> For a more detailed treatment of this point, see Deigh (2010), pp.35-37.

which one thing is grasped in terms of something else”.<sup>132</sup> For instance, one can look at a piece of painting and see it in terms of a concept like *artistic creativity*, or in terms of another painting that one saw earlier. It is a way of perceiving something by means of another. The object that is grasped in a construal is its “focus”, whereas the means by which it is grasped is its “terms”.<sup>133</sup> In our previous example, the painting would be the focus and the concept of *artistic creativity* would be the terms of the construal.

A concern-based construal is then a perception of a situation or object in certain terms that impinges upon the concerns of the subject. For example, Bob may be jealous when he sees Jane, his beloved woman, chatting with another man. The reason for his emotion is because he has a romantic concern for Jane and construes the situation as one in which her affections for him come under threat. If Bob had no romantic concern for Jane at all, it would be near impossible for him to be jealous. Such construals that impinge upon a subject’s concerns are, for Roberts, what emotions are.

It is important to recognize that Roberts is not hereby offering a theory of emotions in that his aim is not to provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for all instances of emotions. Rather, he sees his task as offering a paradigm for understanding the vast majority of cases of mental states that are indisputably considered as emotions. He concedes that not all mental states that are referred to as emotions by the English speaking community are captured by his account; nevertheless, he maintains that his account remains applicable and illuminating for most of what are paradigmatically considered as emotions, such as anger, fear and joy.<sup>134</sup> This is a significant point regarding his project that we shall return to in chapter six. For now, we will attempt to unpack his account of the emotions a little further.

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<sup>132</sup> Roberts (2003), p.76.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p.77.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., pp.64-65.

### 2.4.1 Emotions as Perceptions

For Roberts, the best way to view concern-based construals or emotions is to think of them as a kind of perception, and he notes four ways in which they are analogous to ordinary sense perception.<sup>135</sup> First, emotions involve some sort of experiential presentation of the situation to the subject in the same way that sense perceptions present the object of perception before the subject with a kind of immediacy and impression.<sup>136</sup> When a person experiences anxiety, he is not assenting to any thought nor is he making any sort of judgment or inference. The situation simply presents or impresses him as being unsettling, and often the process is immediate (non-inferential) and involuntary in the same way sense perceptions are.<sup>137</sup> This immediate presentational or impression giving feature of sense perceptions and emotions is what distinguishes them from other mental phenomena such as judgments, beliefs or pro-attitudes which do not involve such impressions.

Second, emotions and sense perceptions are both a kind of structured perception. That is to say, the presentational impressions they provide are structured in a certain way. For instance, one's visual perception is seldom simply a jumbled bundle of sensations. It is almost always ordered in some way such that one can usually make some sense of what is being seen. Similarly, an emotion such as anger incorporates a similar kind of structure by which one is able to discern who the anger is directed at and what the construed offense is. For Roberts, it is in virtue of their structure that perceptions can be said to present various states of affairs and have intentionality (to be about something).<sup>138</sup>

Third, emotions and sense perceptions can both be characterised propositionally. The presentational content and structure of emotions and sense perceptions can often be given a

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<sup>135</sup> Roberts (2010), pp.571-572.

<sup>136</sup> Roberts (2007), p.23.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Roberts (2010), p.572.

propositional characterisation to indicate the state of affairs presented by the perceptions. Hence, we can propositionally characterise our visual perception by the proposition “the cat is on the mat” or our emotion of disappointment by the proposition “the movie which I expected and wanted to be good was not”<sup>139</sup>. This feature of perceptions obviously does not imply that our perceptions and their presentational impression can be exhausted by propositional characterisation. Nevertheless, it remains that an important aspect of perceptions may be described propositionally.

Lastly, the presentational impression of emotions and sense perceptions may or may not “fit the situations they present”.<sup>140</sup> Because emotions and perceptions in general provide the subject with a kind of non-inferential presentational impression, the state of affairs presented by perceptions can then be compared with reality or other normative standards to evaluate its “fittingness” or appropriateness.<sup>141</sup> For instance, one’s visual perception of the cat being on the mat may not fit the actual situation when the cat is actually on a painted plank. Similarly, one’s emotion of anger towards his neighbour for ruining his lawn may not be fitting to the situation when in fact it is his dog which is the culprit. Emotions and sense perceptions are thus able to present certain state of affairs to the subject in a way that may or may not fit the actual situation it is seeking to present.

For the above reasons, Roberts sees emotions as a kind of perception analogous to sense perceptions. Moreover, his characterisation of emotions as carrying a kind of non-inferential structured presentational impression that can be subjected to propositional description and normative evaluation results in a cognitive conception of emotions. Like

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<sup>139</sup> I am here following the defining proposition of disappointment provided by Roberts. Roberts (2003), p.241.

<sup>140</sup> Roberts (2010), p.572.

<sup>141</sup> Roberts notes that normative standards of proper emotional functioning apply in many traditions, including traditions of psychotherapy, religion and ethics. Roberts (2008), pp.499-501.

Edwards, Roberts held that emotions have an intellectual dimension and thus cannot be reduced to a kind of tropism.<sup>142</sup>

#### 2.4.2 Concern-Based Construals

Why are emotions able to generate a perceptual-like non-inferential presentational impression to begin with? The answer, according to Roberts, lies in their structure as concern-based construals. Construals are impressions of the appearance of things to the subject that involve grasping the object in terms of something else. They integrate and organise a variety of diverse elements into a unified whole new experience of the construed object to produce a kind of appearance for the subject.<sup>143</sup> For example, in viewing an x-ray image, one could construe the image in terms of its aesthetic beauty rather than its medical significance. In viewing the image as an aesthetic artefact in aesthetic terms, one organises and integrates the various elements in the image in a particular manner that supports a kind of aesthetic experience or appearance of the image. Such a manner of construing the image would be very different from viewing it in terms of its medical significance and results in a distinct appearance to the subject even though it is the same image that is seen.

Construals are also cognitive in nature. They can be characterised by propositions and be subjected to normative evaluations. Hence, I can often provide a propositional description of the construed appearance of things and evaluate if my construal of women as intellectually inferior is ethical or appropriate. However, the cognitive nature of construals does not imply that they are necessarily conscious, voluntary or subject to the control of reason. My sexist construal of women need not be conscious to me in the sense of being aware that I am seeing women in terms of intellectual inferiors. They can take on a certain appearance to me without

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<sup>142</sup> Roberts (2010), p.572.

<sup>143</sup> Roberts (2003), p.76.

me being aware that I am seeing them in those terms. Indeed, I may believe that I am not a sexist yet continue to construe women in that way. Construals may also be involuntary. I may not want to construe dogs as dangerous but yet find that I could not simply will myself not to. Our ways of perceiving things in certain terms may be so ingrained and conditioned that it might require a prolonged process of psychotherapy to bring those construals to consciousness and deal with them effectively. Nevertheless, these considerations do not preclude the fact that construals can be developed or altered through training and conditioning. Therefore, one's construal of dogs as dangerous and fearsome could gradually be altered through prolonged contact with dogs of a friendly nature or simply through accessing the relevant information.

For Roberts, however, emotions are not merely construals of any sort. Specifically, they are structured construals that incorporate one's concern in generating the emotional perceptual experience.<sup>144</sup> On his view, concerns are the reason why emotions have their characteristic affective tone or feel which is usually lacking in non-emotional construals. Such affective phenomenology is a distinct kind of feeling from, for example, feeling seasick, drunk or other mere bodily sensations which do not stem from a concern-based construal. Thus, the having of the emotion of fear and the experience of its distinctive feel or affect is in large part dependent on one's concern for one's well-being and the manner in which his construal impinges on that concern. Although the affect of emotions can often be felt, Roberts maintains that emotions need not always be conscious or felt. One could be grateful without feeling the characteristic feel of gratefulness. It is possible that one's attention is so fixated on the intentional object of the emotion that one is not consciously aware of the emotion's

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<sup>144</sup> Roberts (1983), pp.20-21.

affect.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, one could be grateful without being consciously aware that one is experiencing an emotion of gratefulness.

### 2.4.3 Emotional Internalization

How then are emotions related to the Christian life? In his religiously orientated work, *Spiritual Emotions*, Roberts raises the question of what it means to *hear* the gospel and argues that what it amounts to is for one to emotionally internalise the preaching of the gospel.<sup>146</sup> To *hear* the gospel and internalise it emotionally is for him to construe one's life and situation in terms of the gospel and have it impinge upon an appropriate concern. Such a construal would take its terms from the gospel message and might include concepts like *sin*, *God* and *eternal life*; images like *the lake of fire*; and perhaps other propositions, objects or sense perceptions. A successful construal of one's life and situation in those terms is however insufficient for emotional internalization; the construal has to impinge upon an appropriate concern. The kind of concern in view is one that the gospel addresses: the concern for righteousness and fullness of life.<sup>147</sup> If a person has no concern at all for his own moral failure nor a concern that death threatens to undo any ultimate meaning and significance to his life, it is near impossible for the gospel to be internalised into his heart.

Concerns also have a hierarchical structure, at least in mature adults.<sup>148</sup> Certain concerns function as master-concerns to which other concerns are subordinate; hence, they determine the overall direction of a person's life. For instance, a person might have a master-concern for moral integrity that serves to integrate and order his other subordinate concerns, such as the concern for wealth. To qualify as a master-concern, the concern should also be a

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<sup>145</sup> Roberts (2003), p.315.

<sup>146</sup> Roberts (2007), p.155.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., pp.30-31.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.16.

stable enough disposition to determine “sufficiently long stretches of one’s emotional and active life” as to be considered the basis of his character and define his “psychological identity”.<sup>149</sup> Such a hierarchical structure of concerns is similar to the Augustinian notion of “a rightly ordered love”.<sup>150</sup> Certain master concerns are worthy concerns and are able to bring about psychological and spiritual maturity, while others are not. In the case of *hearing* the gospel, it seems that one might be able to *hear* and emotionally internalise the gospel to some extent, even if the concern for righteousness and fullness of life is not a master concern. However, if a person were to progress to spiritual maturity and bear the fruit of faith, his concern for righteousness and fullness of life would have to be a master concern or least one that is appropriately high in the hierarchy of concerns. Otherwise, he would be like the seed that falls on rocky soil; although he receives the word with joy, he is unable to yield a harvest because of the choking effects of his other concerns.

## 2.5 A Synthesised Account of Spiritual Perception

### 2.5.1 Spiritual Delight and the Emotions

Does Roberts’ analysis of emotions provide a fruitful avenue to contemporise Edwards’ theory of spiritual perception? I think it does. In particular, I suggest that it is possible to understand the delight produced by grace as a concern-based construal. Understood in such a way, for a person to take delight in God is for him to construe God in terms of the gospel based on his master concern for righteousness and fullness of life. Such a construal would have God as its focus and includes terms such as the subject’s moral failings, his insignificance, his imminent death, the salvation of God in Christ and the promises of

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>150</sup> *City of God*, 15.22.



God. When such a construal impinges upon his master concern for righteousness and life, a delight in God is formed. This is not to suggest that delight is the only emotion one may experience. The gospel may invoke a whole range of emotions, depending on the focus of the construal and the concern it is based upon. Nevertheless, delight or joy is the emotion which the gospel is ultimately leading the subject towards. The gospel is the good news of God with us in Jesus Christ and as good news it has to be ultimately received with joy. The gospel may very well invoke an emotion of fear or shame within us, but it does not and cannot stop there, for it goes on to proclaim the reconciling work that God has accomplished for us in Christ which ought to lead us to a profound joy. The emotion which the good news of Jesus Christ aims toward is joy and delight; however, it may traverse through a variety of other emotions to reach its final destination. Indeed, as argued by Edwards, it is impossible for anyone to have a genuine love for God and not ultimately delight in him. Even the man who is willing to be miserable for God still retains a “greater delight in what is obtained for God, than he had in what he has lost of his own”.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, when the gospel is construed rightly upon the appropriate master concern, it should ultimately bring about a profound sense of delight towards God in the subject. The reason why it often fails to do so is either because the subject is not construing his life and situation rightly, the way the gospel invites him to, or he does not have the appropriate concerns in place.

It might be suggested that in addition to right construals and right concerns, the subject also has to believe in the truth of the gospel in order to experience the spiritual delight of grace. This is not necessarily true, counter-intuitive as it may seem. A person could disbelieve the gospel and still successfully construe his life in those terms and have it impinge upon an appropriate concern of his. Such a construal would be carried out in an ‘as if’ manner, similar to the way we experience delight towards a scene in a movie but do not

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<sup>151</sup> WJE 18:75.

believe it to be true.<sup>152</sup> Such a delight would obviously be shallow compared to one that is based upon a sincere belief in the truth of the gospel. Nevertheless, it is still possible for a non-believer to experience, to a limited extent, the Christian joy through such ‘as if’ construals. This feature of concern-based construals has important implications for the notion of ‘converting grace’ as we shall see later.

### 2.5.2 Delight and the Holy Spirit

As mentioned earlier, Edwards, working from a Reformed-Augustinian conception of grace, is clear that spiritual delight cannot be brought about apart from the work and initiative of God. He is anxious to combat the Pelagianistic tendencies he sees in the Arminianism of his day and contends that the spiritual delight which leads one to saving faith cannot be brought about without a gracious divine work.<sup>153</sup> If we were to relate this point to the ongoing discussion, it is then important to ask what role the Holy Spirit plays in bringing about a successful concern-based construal of the gospel. In light of Roberts’ analysis of the emotions, I propose that the Spirit works primarily in two areas of a person’s psyche to bring about delight in one’s heart: (1) the ability to construe in a certain manner and (2) the formation of a master concern for righteousness and fullness of life. Let us consider each in turn.

Roberts argues that the ability to construe a situation or object in a certain manner is not always under the voluntary control of the subject. Take the example of the following well-known gestalt figure:

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<sup>152</sup> Roberts discusses the possibility of “as if” construals in Roberts (2007), p.26.

<sup>153</sup> WJE 1:453-454.



There are two common ways of construing the figure above. One can perceive it either as a young woman looking away or an old woman with a rather large nose. The old woman construal is perhaps the most natural one for most people and it comes immediately to them in the act of perceiving the figure. For some people, if they were not told that the young woman construal was possible, they would perhaps not have noticed it at all. And even if they were told, some would still be unable to construe it as a young woman even if they really wanted to. According to Roberts, such individuals are “aspect blind”; the figure just could not “come together” in a certain way for them.<sup>154</sup> A person that is aspect blind could take active steps to overcome his blindness. He could try staring at the figure from different angles or focus his visual attention on a particular aspect of the figure. However, all these efforts, although helpful for predisposing the subject in overcoming his aspect blindness, may not be sufficient for it. The ability to construe is not completely under his direct control.<sup>155</sup>

The point made by Roberts above could very well apply to the construal of God as well. As fallen beings tainted by sin, we are aspect blind to the construal of God in terms of the gospel. Such gospel construals are not merely a matter of having all the right beliefs,

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<sup>154</sup> Roberts (2003), p.81.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., pp.81-82.

desires, efforts and propositions in place. In the example of the gestalt figure, one could have the belief that the young woman construal is possible, the desire to construe the figure as a young woman, exert great efforts in his construal attempts and even memorize the markings of the figure by heart but still not be able to construe it as a young woman. Similarly, although right beliefs, desires, efforts and knowledge may predispose a person to the appropriate gospel construal of God, it is not sufficient for it. The Holy Spirit has to work in a person's psychological faculties in such a way that it all comes together for the subject. It is in some sense the opening of one's spiritual eyes, since in overcoming his or her aspect blindness, the individual could now perceive God with a new kind of presentational impression that was not possible before.

The right construal of God is insufficient for spiritual delight in God unless the construal also impinges upon an appropriate master concern. As suggested earlier, the appropriate master concern is the concern for righteousness and life since this is the concern the gospel addresses. Such a master concern is intimately related to our given nature as beings created for personal fellowship and communion with God. I shall label this unique nature that human beings (and perhaps other created personal beings) share as our *eternal nature* and part of this nature is humanity's deep seated need for security, meaning, love and morality. These deep needs can, of course, only be met satisfactorily in God. However, one may not always realise that God is what he ultimately needs and hence not be concerned for it, in the same way a young boy undergoing puberty may experience a dawning sex drive without knowing exactly what it is that he needs.<sup>156</sup> The failure to meet these needs in a full and satisfactory manner leads to a kind of deep frustration, a restlessness of the heart as Augustine puts it.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Roberts (2007), p.36.

<sup>157</sup> *Confessions*, 1.1.

The Spirit's role in the formation of an appropriate master concern is therefore to mould the deep-seated needs of humanity's eternal nature into a specific concern for righteousness and fullness of life. This could be accomplished by a variety of ways which may include providing the subject with the right experiences, evidence for certain beliefs, and help in construing one's life in ways that promote the aforementioned concerns. For instance, God could allow a person to contract a terminal illness so that he could come to experience and believe in the meaninglessness of life in light of his impending death. These experiences and beliefs could then be terms in which the subject construes his life situation, and results in him perceiving his life as doomed to insignificance and moral failure. Such a construal together with the relevant background beliefs about his life is at conflict with his eternal nature, his deep-rooted needs as one destined for eternal communion with God. Consequently, the conflict, if sufficiently acute, may lead to the development of a specific concern: the concern for a solution to his moral failure and insignificance or, to phrase it differently, the concern for righteousness and fullness of life.

The example given is a very simplified account of how God could bring about an appropriate master concern suitable for the formation of a spiritual delight in God. The actual cases are probably much more complex with various psychological elements interacting in a much more nuanced fashion. The point, however, is that the Holy Spirit could in principle forge a master concern for righteousness and life through the surfacing of deep-seated needs that constitute our eternal nature by various means. It is also equally possible that such surfacing could never have occurred were God not to intervene in our psychological lives, especially in the area of construing ourselves as moral failures fated for meaninglessness. The Holy Spirit aids us in overcoming our aspect blindness and grants us the ability to construe our life situation as they really are: we are sinners destined for death and in need of salvation.

Such a Spirit-aided construal would then be a necessary condition for developing a master concern for righteousness and life.

In summary, on the proposed synthesised account, spiritual delight in God is an effect of grace because it is the work of the Spirit within our psychological lives to grant us the ability to construe God in terms of the gospel and have it impinge upon an appropriate master concern formed by the Spirit's operation within us. The result of this inner operation of the Spirit within our hearts and minds is the delightful perception of divine value in a manner not possible before. Without this inward grace, emotional delight in God is not possible.

### 2.5.3 Continuity and Discontinuity with Edwards

Despite its departure from Edwards, the above synthesised account of spiritual delight as a kind of emotion still retains many of the features that Edwards claims for spiritual perception.<sup>158</sup> First, it is a kind of delight in God which often has a sensible felt character that is irreducible to mere intellectual descriptions about God. Second, it is also a kind of perception that carries with it a non-inferential presentational impression to the subject that could potentially be grounded upon the objective reality of God's goodness. Third, spiritual delight and perception retains an intellectual aspect that is constituted by the intellectual content of Scripture and doctrine. Finally, it is a delight that can only be brought about by the work of the Spirit to open the eyes of one's heart and is hence intimately related to the enlightening work of God.

The proposed account, however, is also distinct from Edwards' Locke influenced theory in a significant way. Spiritual delight, on this view, is not a discrete internal pleasure sensation. Rather, it is equivalent to the emotion of joy where the pleasant affect of spiritual

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<sup>158</sup> Refer to section 2.2.4 for the important features' of Edwards' theory.

delight (understood as an emotion) is the pleasure of having a certain concern satisfied by one's gospel construal of God. Such a feeling of delight is thus structured in a certain way and is an aspect of a more complex psychological phenomenon. It is hence neither simple nor discrete. Moreover, as with other paradigmatic emotions such as anger or fear, one could engage in the joyous emotion of spiritual delight without being consciously aware of its characteristic pleasant affect. Therefore, it is not the pleasant feeling or sensation of "sweetness" that is central in our synthesised account of spiritual delight; rather, it is its structure as a gospel-centric concern-based construal of God that is of primary significance.

## 2.6 Edwards' Conflation of Sanctifying and Converting Grace

In addition to the differences noted above, readers of Edwards might also have noticed a significant omission in the synthesised account. The proposal does not mention anything about the infusion of the Spirit, a concept that plays a foundational role in Edwards' theory. This omission, however, is deliberate and the motivation behind it is to avoid a problematic conflation in Edwards' doctrine of grace.

According to Edwards, regenerative or sanctifying grace is logically and temporally prior to saving faith in Christ.<sup>159</sup> Sanctifying grace, in Edwards' theology, is the dispositional influence of the Holy Spirit indwelling in one's heart as an infused and abiding principle of new life. It manifests itself as a kind of spiritual delight that leads one to a response of faith that appreciates and embraces the goodness of the gospel. Moreover, the same dispositional influence and spiritual delight are also at work in the sanctification of a Christian after the act of saving faith, drawing one deeper and deeper into a life of love for God. Hence, on Edwards' understanding, there is no real distinction between converting and sanctifying grace. The

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<sup>159</sup> WJE 13:245.

infused grace that leads one to the initial act of saving faith is also the same grace that progressively sanctifies the believer.

Edwards is not an innovator in this regard.<sup>160</sup> The logical priority of regenerative grace has already been previously argued for by Peter Van Mastricht, a masterful Reformed theologian whom Edwards has a great deal of respect for.<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, it still runs into tension with Edwards' theological understanding of faith. Edwards defines faith as "a thorough believing what the gospel reveals of a Savior of sinners, as true and perfectly good, with the exercise of an answerable disposition towards him."<sup>162</sup> According to him, faith is not a justifying work or righteousness in virtue of which one is rewarded with salvation.<sup>163</sup> Rather, it is the "very act of union" between Christ and the believer. A person is justified by faith alone because faith is the very act of union with Christ, and it is in virtue of this union that God accepts the sinner as righteous.<sup>164</sup>

In typical Reformed fashion, Edwards places a great emphasis on the notion of union with Christ. He held that all the benefits and graces of the Christian life flow from one's union with Christ, including the grace of sanctification and justification.<sup>165</sup> However, this position seems to be at odds with his insistence that sanctifying grace is logically and temporally prior to saving faith. If faith as the very act of union with Christ is the antecedent cause and source of the infusion of sanctifying grace, how can it also be the subsequent effect of that grace? By erasing any distinction between converting and sanctifying grace and making the latter the cause of saving faith, Edwards has in effect undermined the pivotal role of union with Christ as the vital source of one's sanctification.

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<sup>160</sup> Neither is his view an obscure theological position. Many contemporary theologians continue to argue for the logical priority of regenerative grace. For instance, see Snoeberger (2002).

<sup>161</sup> See Mastricht (2002), p.19.

<sup>162</sup> "Faith," in WJE 21:465.

<sup>163</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," in WJE 19:160.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>165</sup> Edwards explicitly links sanctifying grace with union with Christ in "Treatise on Grace," in WJE 21:195-196. See also WJE 13:183-184.



Edwards was motivated in maintaining the logical priority of sanctifying grace partially as a result of his involvement with the Arminian controversy. He wants to preserve the traditional Reformed doctrine of God's sovereignty in man's response of faith and is able to do that by making the regenerative grace of God the motivational and dispositional source of a person's initial act of saving faith. However, the price of making that move is the undermining of the tradition's other core tenet: union with Christ by faith as the basis and source of sanctifying grace.<sup>166</sup>

The theological consequence of Edwards' account is unacceptable, thus my departure from him on this point is deliberate. Instead, I take saving faith to be logically prior to the infusion of sanctifying grace. In addition, I also make an important distinction between converting and sanctifying grace, the former being the grace that gives rise to saving faith and is hence logically prior to the initial act of faith. With this distinction, there is thus a consequent difference between the Spirit-enabled delight in converting and sanctifying grace. The delight of sanctifying grace arises from an infusion of a new spiritual principle within the soul and is therefore a spiritual kind of delight. The delight of converting grace, on the other hand, can be considered a natural delight in God's goodness. It is a delight that does not involve a new spiritual nature; instead, it is caused by what Edwards describes as the Spirit's work of "assisting natural principles"<sup>167</sup> to grasp the "natural good or evil"<sup>168</sup> of the things of

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<sup>166</sup> Hence, Calvin makes union with Christ the foundation of the believers' enjoyment of sanctifying and justifying grace. *Institutes*, 3.1.1. With regard to the wider Reformed tradition, William Evans, in his study of the motif of 'union with Christ' in the Reformed tradition, observes that "many Reformed theologians from Calvin onward have attempted to subsume all of applied soteriology (acceptance with God and transformation of life) under the rubric 'union with Christ'". Evans (2008), p.2.

<sup>167</sup> WJE 2:311.

<sup>168</sup> WJE 18:462.

religion.<sup>169</sup> In other words, the delight of converting grace is, in Edwards' scheme, a Spirit-assisted natural sense of the heart towards the natural goodness of the gospel.<sup>170</sup>

In light of the distinctions drawn above, the synthesised account of spiritual perception and delight that was developed earlier would not, strictly speaking, count as “spiritual” in the Edwardsean sense of involving a spiritual principle. Rather, it is an account of converting grace which involves a Spirit-assisted natural delight that leads one to saving faith. For the sake of clarity, from here onwards we shall term the delight of converting grace as a natural delight and the delight of sanctifying grace as a spiritual delight. The topic of sanctifying grace will be attended to from chapter three onwards, but for the remainder of this chapter, our focus is on the theological psychology of converting grace. In particular, we want to consider how the synthesised account can be employed to provide an account for the generation of faith through natural delight.

## 2.7 Spiritual Perception and Converting Faith

Edwards held that spiritual delight and the response of saving faith are intimately related. A person willingly chooses to embrace Christ and his salvation because of the individual's perception of Christ's loveliness in spiritual delight.<sup>171</sup> In other words, the experience of delight in Christ's goodness presents a powerful motivation to choose him, and allows one to eventually act upon that inclination or motivation. This position can seem to imply that the response of faith is a blind leap without adequate epistemic justification. However, this is not the case. Edwards was adamant that faith is immensely reasonable. He argues along the lines that spiritual delight can provide epistemic justification because it is

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<sup>169</sup> See section 2.2.3 for the distinction between ‘assistance’ and ‘infusion’.

<sup>170</sup> For our discussion of Edwards' understanding of the natural “good” and “sense”, refer to section 2.2.3

<sup>171</sup> WJE 13:245.

the experience of the unique divine quality and excellency of genuine religious ideas.<sup>172</sup>

Therefore, the experience is able to provide the appropriate epistemic grounds for the belief that the ideas are of divine origins and hence, by extension, are also true.<sup>173</sup>

We shall set aside the considerable task of evaluating Edwards' particular argument since our interest here is in natural and not spiritual delight.<sup>174</sup> With regards to natural delight, a similar overall point can be made. According to the synthesised account developed in this chapter, a person experiences natural delight in God because he is able to construe God as the supreme good that the gospel presents him to be. That construal impinges upon his master concern for righteousness and life and manifests itself as a form of delight in God. This delight is possible because his deepest natural human concerns are addressed by the message of the gospel and in that moment of Spirit-assisted concern-based construing, it all comes together for the subject; the goodness of God is presented to him with an immediate perceptual force (or impression) and he perceives God with new 'eyes'. Moreover, as suggested by Edwards, it could also be added that in experiencing delight, the goodness of God may be presented to the subject with such an immediate perceptual force that the goodness of responding rightly to God's saving initiative becomes obviously apparent to the agent and is subsequently acted upon. Therefore, on the synthesised account of converting grace, natural delight can provide one with an adequate motivation for the response of faith. But is it also able to provide epistemic justification for that response? I think it can.

As mentioned earlier, to perceive God's goodness and experience delight in him, it is not necessary to have a background belief that God exists or that one's construal corresponds with reality. However, such a sense of delight would probably be a rather shallow and

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., pp.177-178.

<sup>173</sup> William Wainwright has claimed that Edwards did not assign spiritual perception a role "in the justificatory process itself". However, this claim simply contradicts Edwards' argument in *Miscellanies aa*. Wainwright (1995), p.39.

<sup>174</sup> For a detailed defence of Edwards' argument and its bearing on contemporary epistemology, see Nichols (2003), pp.95-122. Plantinga (2000), pp.290-324.

unstable emotional trait. Nevertheless, the unbeliever could still catch a glimpse of the Christian joy and delight through the Spirit aiding him in forming the appropriate concern-based construal in an “as if” manner. This form of emotional experience is somewhat similar to the experience of joy that a person might have towards certain characters in a movie that he or she fully believes to be fictitious. Therefore, the experience of natural delight in God need not presuppose a belief in the reality of God. Moreover, this experience could serve as *prima facie* evidence for the reality of God’s existence.

In considering if a supremely good God exists, one of the factors to be considered is if the purported divine being is able to meet humanity’s deepest needs. If there is little indication that it is able to do so, it counts as evidence against its claim of being supremely good and all-fulfilling. Construals based on our deepest needs have epistemic value because it provides us a means to test various claims to ultimate human fulfilment that would otherwise be difficult to assess. It allows us to perceive and be directly acquainted with the value and goodness of an object *for us* and thus provides epistemic grounds for one’s belief in the deity’s claim to ultimate human fulfilment. Therefore, it is possible for unbelievers to perceive the goodness of God *for them* in the form of an experience of emotional delight through such hypothetical construals. This delight could then serve as evidence within certain suitable epistemic contexts for the existence of a good God and, in the absence of epistemically defeating conditions, one could be justified in believing in the truth of the construed object through the grounding of the belief in an appropriate perceptual-like experience of delight made possible by the Holy Spirit. The overarching argument for doing so can be framed as follows:<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> The argument provided is an extension of an argument originally formulated by Sandra Menssen and Thomas Sullivan. Premise 1 to 4 is taken directly from their original argument. Menssen and Sullivan (2007), p.63.

1. If it is not highly unlikely that a world-creator exists, then investigation of the contents of revelatory claims might well show it is probable that a good God exists and has revealed.
2. It is not highly unlikely that a world-creator exists.<sup>176</sup>
3. So, investigation of the content of a revelatory claim might well show it is probable that a good God exists and has revealed.
4. So, a negative conclusion concerning the existence of a good God is not justified unless the content of a reasonable number of leading revelatory claims has been seriously considered.
5. A serious consideration of a leading revelatory claim should include an evaluation of its claim, if any, to ultimate human fulfilment.
6. An evaluation of a purported revelatory claim to ultimate human fulfilment can be made by a suitably well-formed epistemic agent through a construal in a hypothetical ‘as if’ manner appropriate to the revelatory claim.
7. Positive evaluations of a revelatory claim to ultimate human fulfilment in the form of an emotion of profound joy and delight can serve as evidence for the truth of such a revelatory claim and increase the probability that a good God exists and has made such a claim.
8. Under suitable epistemic conditions, this evidence can confer epistemic justification on the belief that God exists.

Although it is beyond our scope to provide a careful defence and exposition of each of the above premises, nevertheless, the overall argument does provide a seemingly plausible avenue for establishing the epistemic relationship between the emotion of natural delight and

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<sup>176</sup> For a treatment of some of the major arguments that support this premise, see Craig and Moreland, eds. (2009).

the belief that God exists.<sup>177</sup> In addition, it also shows that the response of faith generated from the experience of natural delight is not necessarily unreasonable or epistemically unwarranted. Within certain suitable epistemic contexts, natural delight could potentially serve as epistemic evidence for the reality of God and his redemptive work.

It is noteworthy that evidence of this sort is also distinct from what Paul Moser calls “spectator evidence” for God; which is, evidence that does not involve the affective and volitional engagement of the epistemic agent.<sup>178</sup> In contrast, in the case of natural delight, the experience of the volitionally charged emotion is the evidence and is therefore a particularly appropriate kind of evidence for something with as much gravitas as the gospel of Jesus Christ. In view of its affective and epistemic character, natural delight is hence particularly well suited to function as a kind of *prevenient* grace: the grace that comes before and grounds our reasonable, volitional and affective response of faith.

Another significant feature regarding natural delight as epistemic evidence is that it is also a kind of evidence that does not require infused grace to be logically prior to saving faith for its accessibility. One important difference between Edwards’ argument and the one presented here is that the latter does not appeal to an infused spiritual nature for an experience of a spiritual delight that can serve as epistemic evidence. Instead, it relies on a Spirit-assisted natural delight, based on natural human principles and faculties, to lead a person to a reasonable response of faith. Therefore, the argument is also compatible with the position that the infusion of sanctifying grace is logically subsequent to saving faith, a position Edwards’ argument does not allow.

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<sup>177</sup> Menssen and Sullivan have provided a detailed defence of premises 1 to 4. See Menssen and Sullivan (2007), pp.Chapters 2-6.

<sup>178</sup> Moser (2008), p.46.

## 2.8 An Edwardsean Objection

Edwards would no doubt be reluctant to accept the distinction between converting and sanctifying grace. He does not allow natural delight the capacity to generate faith. Saving faith, for him, requires a perception of God's intrinsic glory or holiness, which is impossible apart from the infusion of supernatural sanctifying grace.<sup>179</sup> Edwards' desire to reserve the perception of God's transcendent holiness for sanctifying grace is understandable in light of his concern to uphold the dependence of spiritual vision and joy upon the Holy Spirit's indwelling (i.e., infusion). This point of his, however, can still be preserved under the synthesised account if we make a distinction between the structure of spiritual and natural delight. Edwards actually suggested such a structural distinction in the *Religious Affections*. He maintained that the non-regenerate can have something of a natural affectionate love for God. However, such a 'love' has for its foundation the principle of natural self-love. It is a 'love' that is grounded upon one's private interest and natural concern for one's happiness. The delight that is active in this kind of love hence takes the structure of perceiving something of great value *for me* based on some prior concerns I may have.<sup>180</sup> We shall call a delight that takes such a structure the 'delight of self-love'.

The saints' love for God, on the other hand, has a rather different basis and structure. According to Edwards, the foundation of the regenerate's love and delight for God is an appreciation of his intrinsic holiness, glory and beauty quite apart from any prior concerns or private interests one may have.<sup>181</sup> Edwards calls this sort of delight the "love of

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<sup>179</sup> WJE 13: 244-245.

<sup>180</sup> WJE 2:247.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p.249.

complacence”<sup>182</sup> and we shall follow his lead and term a delight (natural or spiritual) that is internally structured in such a manner as the ‘delight of complacence’.<sup>183</sup>

Following the distinction made by Edwards, it is thus possible to differentiate delight in God not only by the kind of principle involved (natural or spiritual) but also by its structure. In particular, the delight of converting grace can be conceived as not only being natural but also as structured after the delight of self-love. It is a delight that is brought about by an appropriate concern-based construal where the concerns are derived from a set of deep but natural concerns regarding one’s life and the perilous situation he or she is in. It is hence a joy of perceiving something of great value *for me* and the satisfaction of some prior concerns I may have. These concerns need not be grounded in an appreciation for God’s intrinsic divine holiness, but could simply be legitimate natural concerns, such as the concern for one’s safety and happiness. The spiritual delight operative in sanctifying grace, however, is more than just a perception of God’s value *for me*. Significantly, it is also a gladness that stems from one’s appreciation of God’s intrinsic divine personal goodness and beauty quite apart from any prior concerns one might have. Spiritual delight is hence structured after the delight of complacence and is constituted by a kind enjoyment of God’s intrinsic holiness and glory that is lacking in natural delight. With this distinction, the natural delight of converting grace therefore need not involve a perception of the intrinsic glory and holiness of God. Hence, the account preserves the Edwardsean point that experiences of delight in God’s transcendent holiness are dependent on the infusion of sanctifying grace.

Even with the structural differentiation between the two kinds of delight, Edwards, however, would still be unsatisfied. He sees the response of faith as possible only if one is

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<sup>182</sup> "Treatise on Grace," in WJE 21:174.

<sup>183</sup> The delight of complacence is not incompatible with the delight of self-love in Edwards’ thinking. However, he held that the delight of complacence has a certain logical priority over the delight of self-love for the regenerate. The regenerate first come to enjoy the beauty of God and only subsequently do they locate their happiness in him. The unregenerate, on the other hand, do not enjoy the delight of complacence towards God. Edwards’ own treatment of this issue can be found in WJE 2:240-241.



already indwelt and infused by the Spirit, since without the infused Spirit one remains trapped in the natural principle of self-love and can never perceive the “true loveliness” and beauty of Christ and respond positively to him in faith.<sup>184</sup> Contra Edwards, the characterisation of natural delight as converting grace presented in this chapter is indeed based on self-love or, more precisely, a set of deep but natural concerns regarding one’s life and its significance. However, I do not see why Edwards’ conclusion is necessarily the case.

In *Miscellanies* 77, Edwards highlights four stages in the act of faith that each requires sanctifying grace for it to be possible: (1) the idea of Christ as being agreeable and truly lovely to the subject, (2) one’s willingness to receive and believe this idea, (3) a hatred of one’s sin, and (4) the act of embracing the idea of Christ and his work.<sup>185</sup> I disagree with his line of reasoning. In response, one can make a distinction between the initial response of faith and mature faith; the former being the first instance of faith in one’s life and the latter being a kind of faith that comes with maturity in the Christian life and vital union with Christ. Initial faith could be grounded in self-love and leads one to cry out to God for mercy out of legitimate self-concern. It need not presuppose that the individual thereby perceives the intrinsic holiness or beauty of God but merely that God is good *for him* with regard to his concerns. As to Edwards’ four stages, if they refer to the act of initial faith, I do not see why it necessarily requires a kind of perception of Christ’s intrinsic majesty and holiness. The idea of Christ can be lovely and agreeable to a subject in virtue of construing Christ as the only one who could meet his or her deepest and most pressing natural concern for meaning and moral failure. Similarly, a willingness to receive the idea could be derived from a perception of Christ’s unique suitability to meet the deepest natural desires of a person’s heart. As for hatred of sin, one need not suppose that initial faith requires a full appreciation of sin’s hideousness and offense, especially so if we assume that young children can have genuine

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., pp.243, 246, 252-253.

<sup>185</sup> WJE 13:244-245.

saving faith. Instead, hatred of sin can stem from an understanding of its natural moral offense and the devastating consequences it has for us and those we empathise with, including God. Lastly, the act of embracing can be motivated from a natural concern to avoid just condemnation and the promise of a vastly superior life. Of course, Christian faith cannot remain at this level of natural self-concern for long, but why could it not begin there? Moreover, such a position does not undermine the sovereignty of God's agency in the response of faith in any way. One could maintain that the kind of natural emotional perception involved in initial faith cannot be had apart from the Spirit's aid in overcoming our aspect blindness and his work of moulding the deep needs of our eternal nature into specific concerns. Indeed, the response of initial faith could even be psychologically "irresistible" given the emotional perception of God's goodness *for me*, even if it is not the intrinsic spiritual beauty and holiness of God that is being perceived. Hence, I do not see why a healthy kind of Spirit-enabled natural self-concern cannot lead to genuine initial faith and genuine cries for divine mercy.

## 2.9 Summation

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide a contemporised account for the theological psychology of converting grace by synthesising Edwards' theory of spiritual perception with Roberts' account of emotion. This is accomplished by understanding delight towards God as a construal of God in terms of the gospel based on one's master concern for righteousness and fullness of life.

In the course of our discussion I have also departed from Edwards by making a distinction between converting and sanctifying grace. One of the main theological advancements such a differentiation makes is that it allows one to take seriously the

theological position that sanctifying grace is causally grounded in union with Christ by faith. Edwards' original account severely undermines such a position and should therefore be rejected. On the contemporised account, converting grace is distinct from sanctifying grace in at least three ways. First, unlike the latter, converting grace is manifested as a natural delight that does not involve an infused spiritual principle. Second, the delight operative in converting grace is internally structured after the delight of self-love, whereas the delight in sanctifying grace is structured after the delight of complacency. Lastly, converting grace as a kind of natural delight can be considered a form of prevenient grace in that such a delight does not require a prior belief in the reality of God's saving act and comes before the response of faith that unites one to Christ. Sanctifying grace as spiritual delight, on the other hand, comes after faith in Christ when the Spirit indwells our heart and communes with us in a way not possible before.

## **Chapter Three: Spiritual Perception and the Infusion of Grace**

### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the focus has been to formulate a contemporised account for the theological psychology of converting grace. For the rest of the dissertation (chapters three to seven), the central task will be to build upon the earlier discussions and provide a contemporisation of Edwards' theological psychology of sanctifying grace and its closely related theory of spiritual perception. As mentioned earlier, Edwards would not have endorsed the distinction between converting and sanctifying grace. His original theory of spiritual perception is essentially a psychology of sanctifying grace. Hence, it is only from this chapter onwards that our task of contemporising Edwards' theory of spiritual perception truly begins.

The organisation of the above task will revolve around the three main components of Edwards' theory – the infusion of grace, the content of Scripture, and spiritual delight. Edwards takes spiritual perception to be the delightful perception of the beauty and excellency of the great truths that Scripture proclaims. Thus, each of these components plays a vital and distinct role in Edwards' overall theory and will each be examined in conversation with the work of Roberts and other related contemporary philosophical literature. To begin, it is appropriate to start with the most foundational notion in Edwards' theological psychology of sanctification – the indwelling grace of God within the saints.

## 3.2 Edwards and the Infusion of Sanctifying Grace

### 3.2.1 Grace as Infusion

Grace, for Edwards, denotes not only the gracious free judicial justification of God for sinners but also the reality of the infusion of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers.<sup>186</sup> His understanding of infusion is partially derived from his Reformed predecessors especially Francis Turretin (1623-1687) and Peter Van Mastricht (1630-1706), both of whom are immensely influential for Edwards' theology.<sup>187</sup> Turretin and Mastricht understood infusion as the divine act of imparting a new principle of spiritual life to the human soul, in virtue of which one is spiritually renewed and alive to God.<sup>188</sup> This new lease of spiritual life through infusion is also the "principle" of sanctification and hence serves as the foundation of Christian sanctification and obedience. Mastricht, along with Turretin, makes a distinction between the Spirit's external work of illuminating a person for the purpose of calling or persuading one to accept the offer of salvation and the internal work of infusion. The latter is "a physical act powerfully infusing spiritual life into the soul" in which the Spirit works to "implant in the heart or will... a new inclination or propensity".<sup>189</sup> The former, on the other hand, is a kind of illuminating work of "moral suasion" on the intellect that does not involve a "physical infusion" or implanting of a new spiritual inclination in the heart.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> WJE 2:469.

<sup>187</sup> Edwards' enthusiasm for Turretin's and Mastricht's work is reflected in his letter to Joseph Bellamy in WJE 32:A73. Paul Ramsey notes that Edwards "may have studied these theologians as a student at Yale; certainly he had done so by the time he was a tutor there." See Ramsey (1989a), p.742. With regard to the influence of Turretin and Mastricht on Edwards, see Morimoto (1995), pp.18-22.

<sup>188</sup> *Elenctic*, 15.4.13, 16.3.6. Mastricht (2002), pp.13-18.

<sup>189</sup> Mastricht (2002), pp.17, 23.

<sup>190</sup> The term "moral suasion" was commonly used by Arminians of Edwards' period to describe the work of God in conversion to morally persuade one to salvation by setting forth reasons to choose him before the mind. Calvinists, on the other hand, insists that "moral suasion" is insufficient for one who is spiritually dead to respond positively to God. What is required is a "physical infusion" or operation of the Spirit upon the fallen human will to bring about a genuine internal change in the depths of a person's heart. For a discussion of the historical context of these two terms, see Cho (2012), pp.87-90.

Edwards broadly follows the concept of infusion outlined by Turretin and Mastricht. Likewise, he makes an important distinction between the gift of “infused grace”<sup>191</sup> and other gracious gifts of the Spirit that do not involve infusion. The key difference between the two being that infused grace involves an influence of the Spirit that is internal and inherent within the subject’s nature and heart, whereas the influence of non-infusive grace remains external.<sup>192</sup> By this he means that the Spirit’s work of infusion exerts a kind of inhering and abiding influence within the subject such that it becomes an integral aspect of the individual and the very nature of the individual can be rightly said to have changed into a spiritual nature. In contrast, there are other more external influences, gifts and works of the Spirit (e.g., the gift of tongues) that do not involve such integral and inhering change of quality or disposition within an individual’s nature.<sup>193</sup>

The internal or infusive work of the Spirit is of great significance to Edwards because, according to him, God’s ultimate purpose for humanity is for them to love and know his supreme glory; it is an end that cannot be achieved by their fallen human nature but only through a deep and genuine internal change of the fallen nature to a spiritual one. Such a change of nature requires a redemptive grace that is infused within the believer rather than one that is merely adventitious.

Another important difference between infused grace and other non-infusive operations of the Spirit upon the human mind is that the former introduces a new supernatural principle to the functioning of the soul or human nature whereas the latter does not.<sup>194</sup>

Edwards, once again echoing his Reformed predecessors, held that this crucial difference is

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<sup>191</sup> WJE 13:171.

<sup>192</sup> "Sermon Two: Love More Excellent Than Extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit," in WJE 8:157.

<sup>193</sup> WJE 2:202-203.

<sup>194</sup> Paul Ramsey observes that “Edwards used the word “principle” in the sense of the Latin principium or the Greek arché. The word “principle” means a source or beginning or spring of disposition and action. But it also means the direction, shape, or contours of human hearts and lives, as in the root of our word “archetype,” or the arché or formative power of Plato’s ideas, such as justice or beauty, or triangularity.” Ramsey (1989), p.16.

also what distinguishes “common grace” from “special” or “regenerative grace”. For him, “common grace is only the assistance of natural principles” and is hence limited to assisting “the faculties of the soul to do that more fully, which they do by nature”.<sup>195</sup> Special grace, on the other hand, infuses and introduces a wholly new and qualitatively distinct supernatural principle to the functioning of the faculties of the soul. It lays a new inhering supernatural foundation within the soul such that the recipients of special grace are able to exercise their faculties in a way that is above their natural potential.<sup>196</sup>

On this Edwardsean framework, the account of converting grace provided in the last chapter is more akin to Edwards’ “common” and non-infusive grace since it gives no mention of the Spirit’s operation as a new inhering and integral vital principle within the human psyche. So although Edwards would surely see converting grace as part of infused grace, the account that was eventually developed by the end of the previous chapter departed from his view and takes converting grace as a kind of non-infusive grace. Thus, in our synthesised account we classify converting grace as a kind of prevenient grace, and properly so, since it comes before and paves the way for the actual grace of the Spirit’s work of infusion.<sup>197</sup> It is hence only from this chapter onwards that we begin our proper treatment of the theological psychology of infused grace. Consequently, the kind of natural delight in converting grace is qualitatively distinct from the spiritual delight derived from infused grace. The former is caused by what Edwards would call the Spirit’s assistance of the natural affective principles of the heart, while the latter by supernatural principles acquired through infusion.

Following Turretin and Maastricht, Edwards takes the infusion of a new spiritual principle to occur in the human heart or will. He conceives of this new principle to be a kind

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<sup>195</sup> WJE 18:155.

<sup>196</sup> “Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17:410-411.

<sup>197</sup> Note that Edwards would not consider converting grace as common or prevenient, since on his view conversion requires the infusion of the Spirit. The reason for my departure from Edwards on this point is given in section 2.6.

of new fundamental inclination implanted within the faculty of inclination or will. However, he does not mean to isolate the effect of infusion merely to a single faculty. Edwards sees infusion as affecting the whole human person including the understanding and he is able to affirm this because he views the faculty of understanding and will (or inclination) as functionally intermeshed.<sup>198</sup> The regenerated will with its newfound spiritual inclination “consents” to the religious ideas in the understanding and therefore alters the axiological appearance of those very ideas to the subject. As remarked by Morimoto, “the infusion of grace cures the will and, through this cured will, transforms the person’s understanding faculty, so that the convert may see the beauty and holiness of God.”<sup>199</sup> Hence, for Edwards, the infusion of grace in the will also serves as the basis for the illumination of the understanding in the form of a consenting delight towards the idea of God.

The infusion of grace brings about a new psychological reality for the regenerate and serves as the basis for the spiritual life.<sup>200</sup> In particular, it grants them a supernatural ‘divine sense’, not available to natural man, which allows believers to perceive the holiness of God in supreme delight. The supernatural sense does not merely allow them to see more of divine goodness compared to the natural man; rather, the saints are able to experience something that is wholly qualitatively distinct from any kinds of sensations of the natural mind.<sup>201</sup> It is akin to gaining a new sense not unlike a blind man gaining the sense of sight.<sup>202</sup> This new ‘divine sense’ is of course Edwards’ spiritual sense or perception which we touched on in the previous chapter.<sup>203</sup> However, what was not explicitly addressed then is the relationship between the Spirit’s indwelling of the believer and the infusion of Grace.

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<sup>198</sup> WJE 1:272.

<sup>199</sup> Morimoto (1995), p.16.

<sup>200</sup> "Love more Excellent," in WJE 8:157-158.

<sup>201</sup> WJE 2:262.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p.205.

<sup>203</sup> See section 2.2.3



### 3.2.2 Infusion as Indwelling Spirit

One of the most important features regarding Edwards' understanding of infusion is that he sees the Holy Spirit as the very thing that is infused within the hearts of believers. For him, the infusion of grace within the soul as an inhering or internal principle is equivalent to the indwelling of the Spirit within the saints. Hence, he asserts that "there is no other principle of grace in the soul than the very Holy Ghost dwelling in the soul and acting there as a vital principle".<sup>204</sup> But before we can fully appreciate the significance of Edwards' thought on infusion, some understanding of the broader historical context is required.

In his *Four Books of Sentences*, Peter Lombard, the immensely influential scholastic theologian of the twelfth century, advocated the Augustinian view that the grace of charity which is poured forth in the hearts of believers is the Holy Spirit himself. According to Lombard, the movement of love in the will of the saints is essentially the movement of the divine Spirit who is the love of God.<sup>205</sup> However, subsequent generations of scholastic theologians were not entirely comfortable with this position and attempted to modify the view by making a distinction between created and uncreated grace. In particular, Thomas Aquinas argued that were the Holy Spirit (i.e., uncreated grace) to move the human will directly in the way suggested by Lombard, the resultant act of charity from such a movement would no longer be voluntary for that person. The movement of the Spirit would effectively bypass or replace the human agency of believers, hence reducing them to mere puppets. Instead, Aquinas held that if the acts of charity were to be voluntary, the human mind or will must be the principle of the action and function as its efficient cause.<sup>206</sup> However, in Aquinas' thinking, Lombard's position makes God to be the external source or principle of the movement of charity as well as its direct cause, thus negating the voluntary nature of the

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<sup>204</sup> "Treatise on Grace," in WJE 21:196.

<sup>205</sup> Lombard (2007), p.1.17.4.

<sup>206</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae q.23 a.2.

saint's charitable act.<sup>207</sup> For Aquinas, the way to preserve the voluntary nature of the believer's works of love is to posit a divinely infused "habitual form", internal to the human agent, that serves as the immanent principle of the charitable act. This gracious habit in the soul is "created grace". It is, in the words of Williston Walker, "a love created within the soul by the sacraments of the church (*gratia creata*) – a truly human disposition or "habit" (*habitus*) of charity whereby the sinner is made acceptable before God and is enabled to live in obedience to God's will."<sup>208</sup> Therefore, for Aquinas, infused grace is distinct from the Holy Spirit and is "superadded" to the natural power of the will, "inclining that power to the act of charity, and causing it to act with ease and pleasure".<sup>209</sup>

There is little indication that Edwards was aware of the controversy over created and uncreated grace. However, as commentators such as Morimoto and Lee have observed, Edwards' understanding of infusion shares some affinity with the above two notions of infused grace.<sup>210</sup> On one hand, Edwards follows in the Augustinian tradition and equates the 'love of God' with the Holy Spirit.<sup>211</sup> He sees the love that draws us to God as the very same mutual love that binds the Father and the Son – the Holy Spirit.<sup>212</sup> Hence, when believers are infused with the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification, they are simultaneously caught up in the eternal Trinitarian love within the Godhead and thereby participate in the Trinitarian life.<sup>213</sup> Therefore, in this regard, Edwards' conception of infusion clearly falls under the Lombardian camp of uncreated grace.

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<sup>207</sup> Roger Haight explains that "according to Aristotelian and Thomistic metaphysics, every act of a human being must be elicited through some form or habit as the immanent principle of that specific act; otherwise, it would not be an act of that person. This means that if God acted merely in me or for me or through me, the act would not be my act". Haight (1979), p.59.

<sup>208</sup> Walker (1985), pp.343-344.

<sup>209</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae q.23 a.2.

<sup>210</sup> Morimoto (1995), pp.41-50. Lee (2002), pp.48-49.

<sup>211</sup> Augustine made this identification in *De Trinitate*, VI.7.

<sup>212</sup> "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21:121.

<sup>213</sup> "Sermon One: Love the Sum of All Virtue," in WJE 8:132.

However, as we have seen earlier, Edwards also often describes the infusion of the Spirit as the establishment of a new enduring and inhering disposition, habit or internal “principle of holy action” within the soul of the saints.<sup>214</sup> The infused principle is distinct from the natural faculties of the human agent, yet it is also internal to the agent in a way that allows the resultant holy action to truly count as his own.<sup>215</sup> As observed by Morimoto, the intrinsic nature of the infused principle or disposition is meant to underlie the voluntariness or freedom of the saint’s holy action: “The will is thereby not dominated extrinsically or forced into service; rather the love of God becomes in the saints the foundation of their true freedom.”<sup>216</sup> Understood in this manner, Edwards’ doctrine of infused grace also shares a striking kinship with the Thomistic camp of created grace.

Is it possible for Edwards to have it both ways? Is the idea of the Holy Spirit as fully sovereign, active and personal on one hand compatible with him somehow being akin to an internal disposition, habit or principle when infused in the hearts of the saints on the other?<sup>217</sup> Does Edwards’ doctrine of infusion reduce the person of the Spirit to an impersonal law-like disposition when infused in the hearts of believers? On this issue Sang Hyun Lee has helpfully pointed out that Edwards’ entry in *Miscellanies* 629 provides an important clue to his own understanding of the matter.<sup>218</sup> In the entry, he argues that the actions of the Holy Spirit as sovereign divine agent are not tied to or determined by the law-like dispositions of the established laws of nature. Nevertheless, he continues, “the Holy Spirit is given and infused into the hearts of men only under this general law, viz. that it shall remain there and put forth acts there after the manner of an abiding, natural, vital principle of action, a seed

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<sup>214</sup> WJE 2:398.

<sup>215</sup> "Efficacious Grace, Book 3," in WJE 21:251.

<sup>216</sup> Morimoto (1995), p.47.

<sup>217</sup> Sang Hyun Lee has observed that unlike the Augustinian tradition, which has often been criticized for its tendency to impersonalise the Holy Spirit, Edwards was careful to present the Spirit as more than just a bond or disposition by highlighting the personal active agency of the Spirit. Lee (2002a), p.19.

Edwards’ presentation of the Spirit as personal and active can be seen in "On the Equality of the Persons of the Trinity," in WJE 21:147.

<sup>218</sup> Lee (2002), p.50.

remaining in us”.<sup>219</sup> As noted by Lee, for Edwards, the Spirit is not reduced to an impersonal law-like disposition or principle of action when infused in the hearts of believers nor is the infused content distinct from the person of the Spirit as in the Thomistic tradition of created grace. Rather, “the Holy Spirit remains and acts directly and immediately as the Holy Spirit, except in accordance with the divinely established general law that the Holy Spirit act ‘after the manner’ of a human principle of action”.<sup>220</sup> That is to say, the person of the Spirit does not *become* a disposition when infused in the hearts of the saints; instead, when he is infused, he has freely chosen to apply his sovereign agency in a way (or pattern) that is functionally consistent with an abiding law-like disposition or principle of action and hence does not cease to be a full-blooded person. In this way, the infused Spirit remains a fully personal, sovereign and active agent present within the hearts of believers and yet at the same time exerts an inhering dispositional-like influence upon the regenerated human psyche.

Edwards’ creative reconciliation of the personal sovereign agency of the Holy Spirit with the law-like abiding dispositional influence of his presence when infused in believers is rather ingenious, transcending the dichotomy between created and uncreated grace. It allows one to affirm the infusion of grace as nothing less than the infusion of the divine Spirit while at the same time accord to grace the function of a disposition or principle of action internal to the human agent. However, his solution also introduces an element of ‘deification’ or *theosis* to his doctrine of infusion. According to Edwards, the divine Spirit is given to indwell the regenerate as a new internal “principle of life and action”. This indwelling of the Spirit changes “the nature of the soul” and brings about a “new nature” that is in some sense “divine”, according to the divine principle of life that is infused within it. The new nature of the soul now “admits divine light” and is able to perceive the glory of

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<sup>219</sup> WJE 18:157.

<sup>220</sup> Lee (2002), p.50.

divine realities.<sup>221</sup> The theosis of Edwards is especially evident in his *Treatise on Grace* where he equates the new principle of saving grace in the heart of the regenerate with the principle of divine love. As mentioned, this divine principle is nothing other than the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Thus he states that “holy and divine love dwells in their hearts, and is so united to human faculties that ‘tis itself become a principle of new nature.”<sup>222</sup> For Edwards, the saints partake of the divine nature because “the nature of the Spirit of God is divine love” and that very same divine nature or love in the Holy Trinity is communicated and infused as a divine principle in the hearts of the redeemed so that the new nature of the soul becomes “spiritual” and by extension divine.<sup>223</sup> Hence, as it turns out, Edwards’ explication of the sanctifying action of the Spirit amounts to a kind of *theosis*, a quite literal and direct partaking of the divine nature such that the new nature acquired through the infusion of the Spirit is also in some sense the divine nature.<sup>224</sup>

The evaluation of Edwards’ theosis will be addressed later in the chapter, but for now there is a more critical issue that requires further elaboration: how are we to understand the union of the person of the Holy Spirit with one’s psychological faculties? More precisely, in what way can a divine person, as opposed to merely the effect of his action or influence, be said to be so united with the faculties within the soul of man so as to form a new nature and intrinsic vital principle? Unfortunately, Edwards does not elaborate much further on the nature of this seemingly mysterious union beyond the assertion that the divine Spirit is united with the soul of man as a divine principle in the heart.<sup>225</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, I hope to build upon Edwards’ fecund psychology of grace and go beyond him to develop an

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<sup>221</sup> WJE 13:462-463.

<sup>222</sup> "Treatise on Grace," in WJE 21:194.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., pp.191-192.

<sup>224</sup> Edwards did not use the term “theosis” explicitly, but a great number of Edwardsean scholars including Stephen Holmes, Michael McClymond and William Danaher have considered Edwards’ view of sanctification as a version of “theosis”. Holmes (2000), p.58. Danaher (2004), p.42. McClymond (2003), p.153.

<sup>225</sup> Robert Caldwell came to the same conclusion noting that Edwards did not know how the saints’ mysterious union with God works but “that it does happen, Edwards was completely convinced.” Caldwell III (2006), p.120.

account for the nature of the Spirit's work and union in the human psyche as an inhering principle or disposition of love for God.

### 3.3 Towards a Theory of Indwelling

#### 3.3.1 Alston's Proposal

What does it mean for the person of the Spirit to indwell the believer and what is the nature of the Spirit's operation as an indwelling presence? The two related questions seem to raise some puzzlement. For one, if the Spirit as divine is already omnipresent, what more can we mean by his indwelling presence within the hearts of believers? Moreover, how can this presence be understood such that it can be considered a kind of inhering disposition and simultaneously also as a kind of participation in the divine Trinitarian life?

William Alston in his insightful essay, *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit*, provides for us some promising thoughts on a number of these issues.<sup>226</sup> In his essay, he examines two common models for understanding the nature of the Spirit's work of transforming and sanctifying believers. Beginning with the "fiat" model, Alston characterises this position as one in which God directly produces "new dispositions and tendencies" within the psychological structures of believers and thereby transforms them into the kind of person he desires. It is a fairly one-sided affair with God simply implanting a new disposition within a person with minimal input, consent and contribution from the agency of the human subject. God simply decrees the transformation and the individual is changed. Alston, however, criticises this picture of sanctification and indwelling as being too impersonal and hence fails

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<sup>226</sup> Alston (1989).

to do justice to the rich interpersonal and familiar description of the Holy Spirit's indwelling ministry in the New Testament (Romans 8:15-16 for instance).<sup>227</sup>

The second model he examines is the "interpersonal" model where the ministry of the Spirit is understood more along the paradigm of interpersonal relationships and interactions.<sup>228</sup> On this view, the Spirit sanctifies the believer in a manner similar to the way human beings usually influence one another, "seeking to evoke responses, voluntary and otherwise from the other person". Hence, whereas on the "fiat" model, sanctification could in principle be accomplished without any kind of personal engagement between God and man, this is not possible on the "interpersonal" model. God transforms us through interacting with us on an interpersonal level; it is an interaction that respects our "personal integrity", choices and agency.<sup>229</sup>

Alston is more sympathetic towards the "interpersonal" model even though he finds the "fiat" model somewhat plausible as well despite his initial criticism. Nevertheless, he argues that the two models ultimately fall short in one important aspect – they both fail to account for the "internality" of the indwelling ministry of the Spirit. Alston notes that the description of the Spirit's indwelling in the New Testament is a form of presence within believers that is over and above the Spirit's omnipresence. God is internally present to the saints in a way he is not to creation in general and none of the models examined are able to adequately account for this "special mode of internality".<sup>230</sup> The same inadequacy can be said for Edwards' account of infusion as well. Infusion understood as the Spirit acting after the manner of a disposition within the saints does not really address the issue of how the Spirit's

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., pp.233-235.

<sup>228</sup> Vanhoozer is a contemporary example of one who rejects the impersonal "fiat" model in favour of the "interpersonal". Vanhoozer (2002), pp.100-124.

<sup>229</sup> Alston (1989), pp.236-238.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p.241.

action upon the human subject in sanctification is “more intimate” than his ordinary action upon everything else in general.<sup>231</sup>

In light of the weakness Alston sees in the two models, he then argues for the “partial life sharing” account as a model for understanding the nature of the Spirit’s indwelling presence. Such a model is understood as the human subject partially sharing in various psychological elements of the Holy Spirit and thereby resulting in a partial merging of psychological lives between the subject and God. In our everyday relationships with others, we do not have direct experiential access to the thoughts, beliefs, experiences and motivations of another in the same direct manner that we have of our own, no matter how intimate our relationship may be. There are “physical and psychological barriers” between us that “insulates” one human psyche from another to some degree. A “partial life sharing” between the Holy Spirit and an individual would then involve a “breaking down” of such “barriers that normally separate one life from another”, allowing believers to be more intimately related to God than to any other human being.<sup>232</sup> On this model, the Holy Spirit would share elements of his psychological life with the saints so that the elements might be “immediately available” to believers just as their own psychological elements are available to them. Moreover, these shared psychological elements would also exert a certain level of influence on an individual’s motivation, action and cognition just as one is typically influenced by his or her own psychological states and dispositions.<sup>233</sup>

The psychological elements that are shared may include experiences, feelings, attitudes, tendencies, values, beliefs or construals. The nature of such sharing is twofold. First,

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<sup>231</sup> Wainwright has argued that, for Edwards, the crucial difference between God’s operations in the minds of unbelievers and the saints is that “the latter are God’s acts and the former are not”. This point, however, still does not address the issue of “internality” as raised by Alston. One could further question what the difference is between God’s act of bringing about various mental dispositions within the saints’ minds and his act of parting the Red Sea, for example. Wainwright (2010), p.211.

<sup>232</sup> Alston (1989), p.246.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.



it is a cognitive sort of sharing. The believer shares in the divine psychological life by being cognitively aware of these psychological states in the same way that he or she is directly aware of his or her own. Second, it may also be a conative kind of sharing. The human subject is not only aware of the various psychological elements but also shares in certain divine conative tendencies such as love, compassion and various motivations of the divine mind. This conative sort of sharing would allow individuals to affectively experience the divine tendencies, urges or motivations in varying degrees of strength. According to Alston, the human agent's conative system need not simply be replaced by God's. Rather, he suggests that the divine conative tendencies may be introduced into the human agent's conative system in an initially "weak, isolated and fragile" manner, existing side by side with the agent's own sinful tendencies.<sup>234</sup> For Alston, it is possible that these new divine tendencies might be considered alien by the agent until he or she psychologically appropriates and nurtures it in a certain way.<sup>235</sup> The transition from the initially "weak, isolated and fragile" cognitive and conative sharing of the divine psychological elements to a "full-blooded" integration of these elements in one's psychological system may require a prolonged and drawn out process of responding freely and rightly to God's personal interactions and coming to own them in a certain way.<sup>236</sup>

Alston maintains that the cognitive and conative aspects of divine sharing constitute what it means to participate in the life of God. He contends that our spiritual rebirth could very well begin with a gracious initiative of God to share and introduce his divine psychological elements into our conative and cognitive system. Although such introduction may commence in an initially faint and fragmented manner, it nevertheless provides the basic divine psychological resources from which they could mature organically through our free

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p.251.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p.246.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p.249.

cooperation and eventually come to transform and sanctify us in comprehensive ways. Hence, in this fashion, believers literally partake of the divine psychological life and come to be united with God in a personal and internal manner.<sup>237</sup>

Alston's model is not meant to be taken as an exhaustive claim on the meaning of indwelling union with God. There might very well be other aspects of participation in the divine life that are not captured by his account. However, he thinks it is likely that indwelling union may at least include a sort of partial psychological union similar to what he has described.

### 3.3.2 Problems with Edwards' and Alston's Accounts

Alston's account of the Holy Spirit's indwelling is quite insightful and turns out to be very complementary to Edwards' own understanding of Spirit infusion or indwelling. Hence, such a model affords one illuminating way of understanding Edwards' suggestion of an indwelling union between the person of the Holy Spirit with our human psyche. Nevertheless, their proposals for a literal human and divine merger do face a number of significant difficulties that ultimately render them theologically and philosophically untenable. Starting with Alston, two philosophical objections can be raised against his model. First, psychological states, such as desires, beliefs and attitudes, are complex states constituted by representational content, relationships with other mental states, subjectivity and other psychological elements, some of which cannot be shared among two distinct individuals. For instance, the propositional content of a belief such as "the person next to me is my wife" is constituted by indexical content (content whose references are determined only relative to their context of occurrence) that cannot be shared in a straightforward manner. Moreover,

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., pp.251-252.

many conscious psychological states such as thoughts, experiences, occurrent desires and attitudes are all partially constituted by a subject's subjectivity, and it seems that the same subjectivity cannot be shared among distinct conscious subjects.<sup>238</sup> It has been argued by Linda Zagzebski that subjectivity, unlike capacities or properties, is absolutely unique and cannot be shared by multiple individuals. It is not a property; it is not a 'what' but an "irreducibly first-personal" "way of being" that cannot be communicated to another being.<sup>239</sup> When I am consciously experiencing a desire, it is *me* who is experiencing it. Another person may have a very similar conscious episode of desire, but his desire would not be exactly the same as mine, and this is because his unique subjectivity would shape the phenomenological content of the conscious desire in a way that differs from my unique subjectivity (my unique first person point of view). It would also seem impossible for me to have an exhaustive cognitive grasp of his conscious experience of the desire because I can never assume his unique subjective point of view. For this reason, Zagzebski contends that "it is impossible that two distinct persons could have had even one experience in common".<sup>240</sup> Therefore, the direct and literal sharing of psychological states may not be as unproblematic as Alston assumes it to be.

The second and more serious difficulty for Alston's account pertains to the plausibility of a finite human being directly sharing in the psychological elements of a transcendent and infinite deity. God's psychological life is so utterly and radically distinct from humanity's that it raises serious questions regarding the metaphysical possibility of sharing in the tendencies, feelings and beliefs of the divine mind to begin with. The psychological elements of the Holy Spirit as a divine and triune being bear a kind of trinitarian and perichoretic psychological structure that is so dissimilar to non-triune and non-

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<sup>238</sup> I use the term 'subjectivity' in the sense employed by Linda Zagzebski to mean a mode of existence that is irreducibly first person with a unique first person point of view.

<sup>239</sup> Zagzebski (2001), p.415.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p.417.

divine beings like us that it is difficult to see how the psychological, metaphysical and ontological chasm between God and humanity can be crossed to allow for a direct and literal partial merging of psychological lives. In this regard, Alston's attempt to make human minds bear the load of a triune and divine psychological life is surely on tenuous grounds.

Turning to Edwards and his *theosis* in particular, there are also several philosophical and theological objections that could be raised against his psychology of grace. To begin, his understanding of divine indwelling faces a similar difficulty that confronts Alston's account. According to Edwards, the minds of the regenerate participate in the same intra-Trinitarian divine love or delight (i.e., the Holy Spirit) that the Father has towards his perfect idea of himself (i.e., the Son).<sup>241</sup> However, it is difficult to see how a finite and often sinful human mind could bear a disposition for a divine psychological state. As mentioned, the divine mind seems to be utterly distinct in kind from regenerate human minds in its perichoretic trinitarian psychological structure and being. As far as we can tell, sincere Christians throughout the history of the church do not possess a trinitarian mind in the same way that God does. Thus, on what grounds can we hold that regenerate human minds are able to bear the same divine psychological states that God does in his trinitarian divinity? Edwards attempts to force a kind of direct meshing of the divine mind with the human mind in a very strong and literal way. But can his conception of infusion be ultimately coherent given the drastically different kinds of minds between divinity and humanity?

Edwards seems to be aware of such an objection to his theology and was ready to take the bold step that not many theologians are willing to. In his *Miscellanies* entry on *Deity*, he states that "if we should suppose the faculties of a created spirit to be enlarged infinitely, there would be the Deity to all intents and purposes, the same simplicity, immutability,

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<sup>241</sup> WJE 13:367-368.

etc.”<sup>242</sup> Edwards was ready to pursue his theosis to its natural conclusion and see the distinction between divine and human minds as not one of kind but simply of degree. Hence, human minds are a kind of lesser divine mind to begin with and were the power of their faculties to be extended infinitely they would be practically indistinguishable from the uncreated divine trinitarian mind. Edwards’ rather bold vision of theosis is sure to cause less adventurous theologians some concern, not least because of the deep rooted tradition of thinking about God as radically transcending his creation in degree and in kind.<sup>243</sup> In the last analysis, Edwards’ theosis faces the same philosophical challenge as Alston’s account: finite and unperfected human minds, even when regenerated, simply do not have the required trinitarian kind of mind, divine resources and cognitive environment to bear the load of a triune and divine psychological life of love. The chasm of divine transcendence cannot be bridged.

Apart from its philosophical problems, Edwards’ account of indwelling also faces several theological difficulties that stem from his pneumatologically driven understanding of the saints’ union with God. Edwards was dissatisfied with the traditional Reformed conception of the Holy Spirit’s soteriological role as the one who applies the benefits of Christ to the believer. He thought that to assign the third person of the Trinity the role of merely applying the benefits of Christ denigrates the importance of the Spirit in salvation. In response, Edwards consciously deviates from the tradition and makes the Spirit the very benefit that was purchased by Christ’s sacrifice to be gifted to the saints via infusion, thereby giving the Spirit greater prominence in the economy of salvation.<sup>244</sup> However, his self-

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p.295.

<sup>243</sup> Regarding the importance of divine transcendence in the historic Christian tradition, refer to William Placher’s work where he traces the foundational theme of divine transcendence in the pre-modern theologies of Aquinas, Luther and Calvin. Placher (1996), pp.21-68.

<sup>244</sup> "Treatise on Grace," in WJE 21:190-192.

conscious departure from the tradition is not without its difficulties and encounters at least three significant theological problems.

The first problem pertains to the charge of monism that Edwards faces during his time and continues to face in contemporary scholarship.<sup>245</sup> Simply put, monism is, in the words of George Claghorn, “the doctrine of believers being or becoming one with the divine substance.”<sup>246</sup> Edwards opens himself up for such an accusation primarily because of the way he characterises the nature of the saints’ union with God. As we have seen, on his account, the person of the Spirit is infused within the soul of the saints as an inhering and abiding divine vital principle such that human nature itself is transformed to a spiritual nature. In addition, Edwards does not make any distinction between the economic and immanent Trinitarian operation of the Spirit in the process of infusion. The Spirit exerts himself within the hearts of the saints in the same way that he does within the immanent inner-Trinitarian life of God.<sup>247</sup> Therefore, his understanding of infusion entails a very direct and literal participation of believers in the immanent intra-Trinitarian love. The issue of monism comes into the picture when this divine act of infusion is rendered as an infusion of the divine essence or substance within the soul or being of the saints. On this understanding, the saints act and function from a vital principle that is essentially the divine essence and are hence literally divine in a way that threatens the transcendence of God.

Edwards is adamant that his doctrine of infusion does not imply a communication of the divine essence to believers.<sup>248</sup> He insists that all he meant was that a certain property or attribute of God (i.e., his holiness) is communicated in infusion, not the divine essence or

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<sup>245</sup> The accusation of monism in Edwards’ time is recorded in “Unpublished Letter on Assurance and Participation in the Divine Nature,” in WJE 8:638.

Contemporary scholars have variously accused Edwards of being a Pantheist (Frederick Woodbridge), Panentheist (Oliver Crisp) and Neo-Platonist (Robert Whittemore). These positions can be construed as a kind of monism. Woodbridge (1904), pp.401, 406. Crisp (2010). Whittemore (1966).

<sup>246</sup> Claghorn (1989), p.633.

<sup>247</sup> WJE 13:513. CF. Caldwell III (2006), p.113.

<sup>248</sup> For Edwards’ refutation of this accusation, see “Unpublished Letter,” in WJE 8:368-340.

substance. Nevertheless, Edwards' plea of innocence is not altogether convincing given especially his affirmation of divine simplicity. Like many other Reformed theologians of his era, Edwards held to the doctrine of divine simplicity. He affirms that there are, strictly speaking, no "real distinctions" in the Godhead other than the divine persons.<sup>249</sup> Therefore, despite Edwards' insistence that what is communicated is merely an attribute of God, that cannot strictly speaking be the case given that God is metaphysically simple with no distinct attribute to communicate. What in fact is communicated, on Edwards' account, cannot be anything less than the immanent person of the Spirit himself. However, such a stance runs into serious theological difficulties. As argued by Oliver Crisp, for Edwards, "each of the divine persons shares the one divine essence. So to refer to a divine person is to refer to the divine essence and (given divine simplicity) to refer to the divine essence is to refer to God." Therefore, self-communication via infusion, when coupled with his endorsement of divine simplicity, entails a fusion of the divine essence with human faculties to form a vital principle within the soul that is constituted by the divine essence. Understood in this way, divinely infused humanity is divine in a very strong and literal way. They share in the divine essence and hence, would not be altogether inappropriate to consider them as a junior fourth member of the Godhead. Such a theological position threatens the transcendence of God and blurs the distinction between divinity and humanity.

The second major difficulty with Edwards' doctrine of infusion is the way it marginalises the humanity of Christ with regards to the saints' participation in the Trinitarian life and their vital union with Christ.<sup>250</sup> Although Edwards conceives of the believers' union with the Spirit via infusion as the same basic reality as their union with Christ, he

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<sup>249</sup> "Discourse on the Trinity," in WJE 21:131-132.

<sup>250</sup> This criticism applies to Alston's "partial life sharing" model as well.

nevertheless views union with the Spirit as logically prior to vital union with Christ.<sup>251</sup> The saints are first and foremost united to the Spirit and only in a subsequent and derived manner are they united to Christ. Moreover, the way in which he makes the connection from Spirit-union to vital union with Christ is to equate the Holy Spirit with the Spirit of Christ. The saints enjoy vital union with Christ via infusion because the Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of Christ.<sup>252</sup> The problem with such a move is that Edwards has effectively removed the humanity of Christ from his account of vital union with Christ. Edwards uses the term “Spirit of Christ” virtually as a synonym for the Holy Spirit and certainly sees the “Spirit of Christ” as a divine Spirit rather than a human one.<sup>253</sup> In this regard, Edwards has deviated considerably from his theological predecessors, especially Calvin. Whereas Calvin insisted that it is in virtue of our union with Christ in his humanity and not the Son in his divinity or the divine Spirit that we participate in the Trinitarian life,<sup>254</sup> Edwards mostly bypasses the humanity of Christ and thrusts believers directly in the immanent Trinitarian life through the immediate infusion of the divine Spirit in the being of the saints. This displacement of Christ’s humanity by the divine Spirit has been perceptively observed by William Evans:

Given the extraordinary stress placed by Calvin on union with the incarnate humanity of Christ, and also the emphasis placed by Edwards’ Puritan forbears on affectionate communion with Christ’s humanity, it is interesting to note that in his presentation of the theme of union with Christ Edwards virtually ignores the humanity of Christ. This is doubtless because, for Edwards, the goal of salvation is an immediate union with the divine. While the humanity of Christ is relevant to the initial work of redemption (the active and passive obedience of Christ) and it has the role of mediating a revelation of the deity, the Holy Spirit has to a great extent displaced the concrete theanthropic person of Christ in Edwards’ presentation of applied soteriology.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Robert Caldwell makes the same point and provides a detailed argument for the priority of believers’ union with the Spirit over union with Christ in Edwards’ thought. For details, see Caldwell III (2006), pp.121-126.

<sup>252</sup> See, for instance, WJE 2:199-200.

<sup>253</sup> For instance, see “Sermon Twelve: Christian Graces Concatenated Together,” in WJE 8:332. See also WJE 3:280. and WJE 2:392-393.

<sup>254</sup> *Comm. John*, 6:51. and *Institutes*, 4.17.8-9. Regarding Calvin’s emphasis on union with Christ’s humanity, see Wallace (1995), pp.145-149.

<sup>255</sup> Evans (2008), p.99.



In addition to the above difficulty, one also has to question the soteriological logic of Edwards. Is the immediate object of the saints' union the divine Spirit or the human Christ? Are believers first and foremost substantially united to the humanity of Christ and in virtue of that union united to God, or are they directly and immediately united to the divine Spirit thus bypassing the humanity of Christ in the process? Calvin and many of his theological descendants have held that believers are united to the man Jesus through the Spirit and via that unity enjoy union with God, hence making the immediate object of our union the human Christ rather than the divine Spirit.<sup>256</sup> However, on Edwards' account, the Spirit is no longer merely the means of union but has instead become the immediate and direct object of union. Such a view undermines the centrality of Christ's humanity in the saints' union and participation in God's Trinitarian life.<sup>257</sup>

In marginalising the humanity of Christ, Edwards' account of infusion faces a third theological difficulty that is related to the second: it undermines the significance of the humanity of Christ in the sanctification of believers. To be clear, Edwards does assign an important role to Christ's humanity in the believers' sanctification. Christ as the God-man is the indispensable means by which the knowledge of God's glory is communicated to all creation.<sup>258</sup> Nevertheless, the humanity of Christ never really takes on the foundational and primary role that the divine Spirit does in his overall account of sanctification.<sup>259</sup> The

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<sup>256</sup> See, for instance, Calvin's comments in *Comm. John*, 17:21. A similar point is made by T.F. Torrance when he asserts that "the Reformed doctrine of the Communion of the Spirit is not a doctrine of communion in spirit or even simply a doctrine of communion in the Spirit, but a doctrine of Communion in Christ through the Spirit". Torrance (1959), p.cvi.

<sup>257</sup> The shift from Calvin to Edwards in the Reformed tradition is a gradual one. Evans observes that whereas "Calvin places particular emphasis on a "substantial" union with the incarnate humanity of Christ, through which salvation in its fullness is communicate", "for later Federal theology, however, the Holy Spirit functions as a surrogate for an absent Christ instead of mediating a personal presence... thus, the humanity of Christ often tended to become little more than a matter of historical importance, a necessary precondition for the atonement". Evans (2008), pp.81,83.

<sup>258</sup> WJE 20:221.

<sup>259</sup> Ross Hastings makes a similar judgment when he remarked, "That the Son must become one with them in his incarnation for the effecting of this union, is not a point that Edwards neglects. However, that truth, in my assessment, plays second fiddle to the truth that union is effected in the saints by the Spirit's infusion". Hastings (2005), p.284.

holiness of the saints is first and foremost the effect of divine love infused in the soul. Hence, in his analysis of Edwards' pneumatology, Ross Hastings arrives at the following conclusion:

Until love enters the human soul by the Spirit the salvation purchased by Christ's death and resurrection is of no value to the human soul. The incarnation and atonement of Christ apply only to the elect who are infused by the Spirit in regeneration, and their value is, as it were, on hold until the Spirit as the gift accomplished thereby initiates regeneration and infuses the believer with love.<sup>260</sup>

In Edwards' thought, Christ's humanity is significant for sanctification only in the sense that it fulfils the preconditions necessary for the possibility of God's soteriological gift of transforming power.<sup>261</sup> However, the actual life-giving power of salvation is not found in his incarnate humanity, but instead, in an immediate union with the divine Spirit. For Edwards, the foundation and engine of sanctification remains the divine Spirit exerting himself as an abiding divine principle of love, and the humanity of Christ plays no discernible role in the formation of such a divine disposition that drives the sanctification of believers. The consequence of his account is that it introduces a theologically problematic disconnect between the human sanctification of Christ and the sanctification of the saints. Contrary to the New Testament's vision of sanctification, Christ's own human sanctification is not the cause and basis of the sanctification of believers.<sup>262</sup> What drives and empowers the Christian life and growth in holiness is a divine principle grounded in the immanent divinity of the Spirit rather than a human principle grounded in the ongoing incarnate humanity of Christ.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Hastings (2004), p.150.

<sup>261</sup> Hence, he argues that God must be incarnate for divine self-communication of his glory to creation to be possible. "Concerning the End for Which God Created the World," in WJE 8:439-442.

Hastings makes a related observation, noting that the hypostatic union of Christ "makes possible (not real) the union of the saints with God." Hastings (2005), pp.298-299.

<sup>262</sup> It was argued by Sinclair Ferguson that the claim of Jesus in John 17:19 provides the "programmatic statement" for the foundation of sanctification in the New Testament. He observes that "in the most fundamental sense, the New Testament views Jesus as the author of sanctification, its pioneer (archegos)... The human holiness that becomes ours through the Spirit has its origin in the holiness wrought out by Christ throughout the course of the incarnation." Ferguson (1996), p.143.

<sup>263</sup> One of the reasons for this neglect of the humanity of Christ lies in Edwards' 'Spirit Christology'. It has been argued by Hastings that "Edwards sounds perilously close to sounding Apollinarian in his description

### 3.3.3 Two Modifications to Alston's Theory

The difficulties raised above pose a number of serious challenges for Edwards' and Alston's accounts of indwelling and threaten to render their proposals ultimately untenable. Nevertheless, I suggest that there are two modifications one can make to Alston's original account to overcome the challenges that were raised and yet preserve the model's fruitfulness for understanding the nature of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. The first modification pertains to the content of the psychological states that are shared between individuals. If our first objection to Alston's theory is accurate, it seems that his assertion that God's attitudes, beliefs and tendencies may be "as immediately available to me as my own"<sup>264</sup> must be qualified to exclude divine psychological states that are constituted by elements that cannot be shared between two distinct subjects. What could be shared are divine dispositions and tendencies that do not involve conscious subjectivity and indexical representational content.

The second modification corresponds to our other objection against Edwards' and Alston's accounts regarding the philosophical and theological difficulties associated with a literal merging of a human and divine mind. These difficulties could be avoided if one inserts a vital Christological step and instead of insisting that the human subject shares directly in the various divine psychological elements of the Holy Spirit, one takes the subject to share in the human psychological life of the man Jesus. Therefore, on this modification, humanity does not share directly in the immanent divine psychological life within the Godhead but only as it is incarnated in the human psychological life of Christ. The human life of Christ thus serves as a mediatory for man's union and participation in the life of God.<sup>265</sup> Humanity is only

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of the uniting of the historical man Christ to the Logos". If Hastings is right in his criticism, then it is to be expected that there is a downplaying of the human spirit and mind of Christ in his overall understanding of sanctification and the saint's vital union with Christ. Hastings (2005), p.299.

<sup>264</sup> Alston (1989), p.246.

<sup>265</sup> This mediatory function of Christ's humanity is of course well-established in the Christian tradition and can already be found in the soteriology of Augustine. Augustine's soteriology is succinctly captured by Stanislaus Grabowski's comment that, for Augustine, "it may be said that the humanity of Christ is the point of

indirectly united with the psychological life of God via being directly united with the human mind of Christ. In this way, we avoid the conceptual and theological difficulties involved in a direct and literal partial merging of divine and human psychological lives that plagued Edwards' and Alston's original accounts. In addition, we also avoid the theological problem of marginalising the humanity of Christ in the saints' union with God and their participation in the Trinitarian life by making the humanity of Christ their immediate object of union rather than the divine Spirit.

#### 3.3.4 A Modified Theory of Indwelling

In light of these two modifications, my proposal for understanding the nature of divinely infused grace is to equate it with a modified Alstonian partial life sharing model. On this modified account, for God to infuse his love within our hearts is for the resurrected and living incarnate Christ to partially share his ongoing human loving disposition with us by means of the Holy Spirit. Such a disposition is one that does not involve conscious subjectivity and indexical representational content. Moreover, it is in virtue of this infused grace or love that believers can begin to overcome the domination of sin and come to love the holiness of God.

Following Edwards, the human loving tendency Christ shares with his church could be understood as consisting of a certain motivation for union and a good-seeing disposition towards God. Edwards conceives of the infused principle as a new disposition or capacity to perceive and appreciate the goodness and beauty of God in joyful delight. This infused disposition is also a kind of love, since part of what it means to love someone is to appreciate

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contact of the divinity with the Church, and that it constitutes at the same time a channel, as it were, through which the springs of life, surging from a divine fountain-head, may flow copiously. For Christ, as St. Augustine trenchantly remarks, is "human divinity and divine humanity." Grabowski (1946), p.77.

the ways in which that person is good. Love is nourished and constituted by such an appreciation, without which it is difficult to see how anyone can love. In addition, Edwards also views the new disposition as playing an important unitive role in the regenerate's relationship of love with God. For him, love includes a unitive component; that is, it involves a longing to be together with the one loved and a coming to see the good of another as one's own. Hence, he argues that love "includes a desire of union with the object as well [as] a desire of the welfare of the object".<sup>266</sup> This unitive desire in the regenerate is of course generated by the infused disposition and it motivates one to "union and intercourse" with God.<sup>267</sup>

Much of Edwards' understanding on the infused disposition of love remains compatible and applicable to our modified account of infusion. Hence, in light of his analysis, it is plausible to suppose that for Christ to share his human loving tendency would involve sharing his good-seeing disposition towards God and the motivational drive to be united with the Father. I shall term this dual aspect of the disposition Christ shares with members of his church as the 'unitive drive' for short. Let us try to develop this notion a bit further.

A helpful way of conceiving the unitive drive is to see it as analogous to a human sex drive. A sex drive dawning in a young boy undergoing puberty may start off weak and without much representational content. He feels a mild urge towards something without knowing exactly what is it that he wants. It is only after acquiring a certain amount of experiences, propositional content and beliefs that he begins to come to understand clearly what he is drawn towards. Moreover, this growing sex drive also instils within him a newfound good-seeing disposition towards the opposite gender and a certain added capacity to enjoy his relationships with them. Through the development of a sex drive he has come to

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<sup>266</sup> ""Controversies" Notebook: The Nature of True Virtue," in WJE 21:326.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., pp.326-327.

acquire novel powers of appreciation, perception and enjoyment of the ways in which they are good in a manner not possible before. These new powers of his psyche in turn motivate him to towards union of life with members of the opposite gender.

In an analogous fashion, when Christ gives of himself to us, he shares with us his drive towards union with God and his disposition to appreciate, perceive and enjoy the goodness of his heavenly Father in novel ways. The human unitive drive of Christ hence opens up new motivations for union and life with God that are unavailable and psychologically alien to those without this drive. In addition, like a slowly dawning sex drive, the sharing of Christ's unitive drive with us could also be gradual and need not entail an exhaustive sharing of that drive all at once. His human loving tendency could be shared without sharing the full strength of that tendency instantaneously. Therefore, our experience of the unitive drive might very well begin as weak or partial and gradually grow only as we mature spiritually.

Another significant parallel between a sex drive and the unitive drive, especially in the context of Edwards' theory of spiritual perception, is that they are both partially aesthetic in nature. An important aspect of the good-seeing disposition instilled by a sex drive is the capacity to perceive and appreciate the aesthetic beauty of the opposite gender in a manner quite distinct from perceptions of beauty without the sex drive. Our human sex drive brings about a unique kind of perception of sexual beauty that typically only arises in relation to perceptions of the opposite gender. This sex drive is thus able to reveal a unique sexual kind of aesthetic properties that can only be grasped through the sexual perceptions it affords. Similarly, the human unitive drive of Christ grants us epistemic access to a distinct class of aesthetic properties regarding divine realities that can only be perceived through the kind of perceptions the unitive drive makes possible.

It should be noted that the unitive drive of Christ is not equivalent to a robust virtue of love for God that the Christian life demands. Thus, the sharing of this drive is not incompatible with the existence of sin and immaturity in the life of the regenerate. The unitive drive is simply an aspect of Christ's human love for the Father and not his full virtue of love. Indeed, the love of God within Christ and the hearts of believers is not merely a bare good-seeing disposition or motivating drive; instead, it is a virtuous love that is constituted by concrete representational content, practical wisdom and various skills of self-management that mere bare dispositions lack. Hence, it is important to make a distinction between the unitive drive that is infused and the resultant virtuous love of God that it gives birth to. The former is a disposition without any clear representational content, understanding and practical know-how, which in itself is insufficient to be counted as a kind of psychological attitude or Christian virtue. The latter, on the other hand, is a robust and concrete virtuous love firmly oriented towards the Trinity and divine reality. Nonetheless, despite their differences, the unitive drive does serve as the basis for the formation of a virtuous love for God. Their relationship is analogous to that between a sex drive and romantic love. A sex drive is not equivalent to romantic love, but it is foundational and constitutive of a whole range of romantic phenomena including our romantic delight, appreciations, concerns, attractions, motivations and love. Thus, in a parallel fashion, the unitive drive, as Edwards puts it, lays a "new foundation" in our soul and allows us to use our human faculties in a new way.<sup>268</sup> It thereby opens up a whole new range of sui generis emotions, experiences, motivations, concerns and appreciations towards God that are not previously available to the natural man.<sup>269</sup> Moreover, because these novel psychological phenomena towards God and his glory are constituted and made possible by Christ's human unitive drive, there is a sense in which

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<sup>268</sup> WJE 2:206.

<sup>269</sup> "Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17:411.

one can affirm that the believer's spiritual life and worship are a result of a participation in Christ's ongoing love for the Father in his human mind.<sup>270</sup>

### 3.3.5 The Spirit as the Mediating Divine Agent

With the emphasis on the humanity of Christ, the modified Alstonian account hence avoids the problems that confront Alston's and Edwards' original accounts of indwelling. However, by substituting the sharing of the Spirit's divine psychological elements with Christ's human unitive drive, does it run into the opposite problem of removing the Holy Spirit from the picture of indwelling? If not, then how is the human unitive drive of Christ related to the divine Spirit and what role does the Spirit play in the modified account?

The answers to the above questions can be found in the Reformed tradition's view that the Holy Spirit mediates the presence and life of the resurrected Christ to the church.<sup>271</sup> On this line of thought, the Holy Spirit plays the crucial role of functioning as the divine vehicle through which the particular and localised human unitive drive of the living Christ is made universally and simultaneously present and available to all members of the body of Christ. This mediating role of the Spirit need not undermine his sovereign personal agency in any way. As suggested by Edwards, the Spirit has freely willed to apply his personal agency after the manner of an inhering dispositional-like influence upon the human psyche. The nature and content of the Spirit's action in infusion is hence to actively apply and sustain the unitive drive of Christ in the hearts of believers so as to produce a new stable and inhering disposition in them. Without the Spirit's personal and active agency in mediating and applying the content of Christ's unitive drive in their hearts, they would lose their engraced

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<sup>270</sup> The importance of the believer's participation in the human mind of Christ and his human love for the Father in our spiritual life and worship is well brought out by T.F. Torrance's essay on "The Mind of Christ in Worship". Torrance (1975).

<sup>271</sup> *Institutes*, 3.1.1.



nature immediately. Therefore, the modified account is consistent with Edwards' claim that "if God should take away his Spirit out of the soul, all habits and acts of grace would of themselves cease as immediately as light ceases in a room when a candle is carried out".<sup>272</sup>

Giving the Spirit the mediating role, however, does not address the question of how, on the modified account, one can make sense of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that is so prominent in the Christian tradition. Specifically, in what sense can one still affirm that the divine Spirit indwells the believer if it is the humanity of Christ that believers are directly united to? One possibility would be to make a distinction between the *act* of infusion and the *content* that is being infused. On the modified Alstonian model, we can take indwelling to denote the divine act of removing or "breaking down" the "barriers that normally separate one life from another"<sup>273</sup>, in the way suggested by Alston's original theory, and thus grant believers cognitive and conative access to an aspect of the human psyche of Christ. This is an access that we normally do not enjoy with any other human being. In addition, the concept of indwelling could also cover the divine act of implanting, sustaining and nurturing the content of Christ's unitive drive *within* the human conative system of the saints such that the content becomes an inhering disposition of their conative system. Indeed, there are many ways in which one can affirm that the divine Spirit is in some sense dwelling and present within the saints that are short of a substantial merger between the divine Spirit and humanity as suggested by Edwards and Alston. Therefore, regardless of how one wants to spell out the precise nature of indwelling along these lines, it need not entail a direct ontological union with divinity and therefore does not contradict the claim that the Spirit does indwell the saints to bring about a substantial union with Christ's humanity. Without the divine Spirit dwelling within believers and acting within their psychological system, the human unitive drive of Christ could never be implanted and sustained in them. Hence, in this way, the Holy Spirit

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<sup>272</sup> "Treatise on Grace," in WJE 21:196.

<sup>273</sup> Alston (1989), p.246.

remains the indwelling means through whom believers are substantially united with the human Christ without thereby becoming the immediate divine object of their substantial union.

In summary, the modified Alstonian account of indwelling provides an illuminating model for understanding the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and its relationship with Jesus Christ. On this model, believers can be said to be united to the human mind of Christ by the Spirit in a rather literal way, hence providing one possibility for making sense of what it means for us to be in Christ and for Christ to be in us through the Spirit. Accordingly, it is through the sharing of his unitive drive with us by the Spirit that Christ's human mind is partially merged with ours. Christ is in us and we are in him and quite literally so. Moreover, the modified account also gives proper weight to the mediatory role of Christ's humanity in our sanctification and substantial union with God. For Alston and Edwards, man is directly and immediately united to the divine Spirit and hence, marginalises the mediation of Christ's humanity. In contrast, on the modified account, the life-giving essence of salvation is grounded upon the ongoing sanctified humanity of Christ such that were the man Jesus to cease loving the Father or existing as a human being, there would be no human unitive drive for the Spirit to mediate to the church.<sup>274</sup> The ontological grounds of Christian sanctification together with our substantial union with God would vanish instantly. The modified model therefore highlights the continual vital relevance of both the Holy Spirit and the human Christ in the church's sanctification. On one hand, the man Jesus' ongoing obedience, love and faithfulness to the Father provide the ontological grounds for our sanctification in the form of

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<sup>274</sup> This point is consistent with the findings of James Hamilton's work in biblical theology. Hamilton argues that, from a biblical and theological point of view, there is a significant difference between the Spirit's presence in the Old and New Testament era. He observes that "prior to Jesus' glorification God sanctified believers by His presence *with* them rather than *in* them". In the Old Testament, God is usually described as indwelling his temple and not his people. It is only in the New Testament that we start to see a shift in the description of God's presence as being *in* his people. On the view of infusion promoted in this chapter, one possible explanation for this shift is that Christ's human unitive drive was made available for infusion by the Spirit within the saints only after his glorification. Hamilton Jr. (2006), p.4.

his unitive drive. On the other, the continual ministry of the Holy Spirit in vivifying and sustaining Jesus's human love for the Father makes possible for Christ's ongoing human unitive drive which the Spirit then mediates to the saints. In addition, as divine lord and giver of life, the Spirit also oversees the growth, maturation, preservation and continual application of that human unitive drive within believers in order that the church may come to attain the mind of Christ.<sup>275</sup> The incarnate Son and the divine Spirit are hence both vital agents in making actual (rather than merely making possible) the life-giving participation of the church in the Trinitarian life.<sup>276</sup>

### 3.3.6 An Objection to the Modified Account

There is, however, one apparent difficulty which the modified account seems to face that Edwards' and Alston's theories do not. On their proposals, it is easy to see how humanity could partake in the divine life and be taken up into the eternal Trinitarian communion, since on that view the psychological life or faculties of believers are directly merged with the divine Spirit. However, on the modified account, one is instead partially merged with the psychological life of the human Christ. If this is so, is it still a case of participation in the divine Trinitarian life and communion or merely a participation in the human life of Christ?

To answer this, it would be helpful to first consider the traditional orthodox view regarding Jesus. Orthodox Christianity makes a distinction between the person and natures of Christ. The person of Christ, i.e., the Logos, is uncreated and has the status of being a member of the Trinitarian community. Through the incarnation, the Logos comes to acquire a human will in addition to his divine will and for our purposes we will refer to them as the

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<sup>275</sup> The relationship between the unitive drive and the human mind of Christ will be further examined in chapter seven.

<sup>276</sup> I am indebted to Hastings for the distinction between making actual (or real) and making possible the life-giving participation in the life of God.

human mind and divine mind of the Logos respectively.<sup>277</sup> The two minds are distinct but nevertheless ontologically united in virtue of being possessed by the same person. On this conception, the Logos as man is distinct from all other men in one important regard – his person is not created and stands as a member of the eternal Trinity. From this orthodox Christology, one could proceed to argue that the person of Christ as a human being continues to enjoy the *sui generis* intra-Trinitarian communion in virtue of being an uncreated person of the Trinitarian community. As man, his participation in the intra-Trinitarian communion in his human nature or mind would no doubt be different from his participation of that same communion in his divine nature. Nevertheless, it does not make his human participation any less genuine. It simply means that the man Jesus participates in the intra-Trinitarian communion of persons in a human rather than a divine way. The eternal communion between the persons of the Trinity continues to hold even when the Logos is incarnated as man. Therefore, when the church is united to the human mind of Christ through the Spirit, she is also at the same time participating in his ongoing human way of partaking in the intra-Trinitarian communion.<sup>278</sup>

A consequence of the modified account of indwelling, unlike Edwards' and Alston's original models, is that believers do not share in the Trinitarian life as divine beings do but only in a manner appropriate to human beings by means of a partial union with the human psychological life of Christ through the Spirit. In other words, *contra* Edwards, the saints do not have a divine principle or disposition infused within their souls, but instead the human disposition of Christ. Nevertheless, this human way of participation remains a genuine case

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<sup>277</sup> The two wills view of Christ is affirmed by the 6th Ecumenical council in AD 681 and can be traced back to at least Origen of Alexandria. Although affirming that Christ has two wills is strictly speaking distinct from affirming that he has two minds, it seems that having two wills entails having two minds. For a helpful conceptual analysis of the various possibilities in which Christ can have two minds, see Marmodoro and Hill (2010).

<sup>278</sup> T.F. Torrance argues for a similar point, stating that "in Jesus Christ God has embodied in our human existence the mutual knowledge which the Father and the Son have of one another and in the Holy Spirit he gives us communion in the mutual relation of the Father and the Son and thus makes us share in the knowledge which the Father and Son have of one another." Torrance (1988), p.55.

of partaking in the intra-Trinitarian life. Indeed, it is just as real as Jesus' human participation in the intra-communion of the Trinity.<sup>279</sup>

### 3.3.7 A Trinitarian-Human Drive

The contention above brings us to a closely related point that should be highlighted. Although we have characterised the unitive drive of Christ as a human unitive drive, it is also in a significant sense a superhuman, or more accurately, a Trinitarian-human drive. The unitive drive of Christ, while considered human in the sense of belonging to his human nature, is nevertheless developed and shaped under the influence of his unique human participation in the intra-Trinitarian communion as the only Son. To a significant degree, the human character dispositions arose the way they did in the earthly and resurrected life of Jesus due to the communion and love that he shares with the Father as the uncreated second person of the Trinity. This human way of participation in the intra-Trinitarian communion of uncreated persons profoundly influences the human career of Jesus and serves as a crucial basis for the subsequent development of his human unitive drive. Therefore, the human unitive drive of Jesus has genetic roots in the intra-Trinitarian love of uncreated persons that exceeds the possibilities and potential of any created being. In other words, the human unitive drive of Christ cannot be created or replicated; it can only arise as a result of the incarnation of the only begotten Son.<sup>280</sup> Consequently, while the unitive drive of Christ is a distinctly human

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<sup>279</sup> Thus, Calvin was right in arguing that the life Christ gives is not the life he has in his divinity, but as it appears in his humanity. He remarks, "Accordingly, he shows that in his humanity there also dwells fullness of life, so that whoever has partaken of his flesh and blood may at the same time enjoy participation in life." (Institutes 4.17.9) It has even been suggested by Todd Billings that Calvin could be seen to hold to a version of deification or theosis along these lines; namely, that "redemption involves the transformation of believers to be incorporated into the Triune life of God, while remaining creatures". Whereas, he would be more resistant towards the Edwardsean conception of theosis where there is a mixing of divinity with humanity. Billings (2007), pp.54-55.

<sup>280</sup> An important theological corollary to this point is that there is a significant distinction between Christ's "perfect obedience to the law" and his "unique life of Sonship". Julie Canlis has observed that the Reformed tradition after Calvin has often focused exclusively on the merit of Christ's perfect obedience to the

drive, it is nonetheless dependent on the kind of loving intra-Trinitarian communion Jesus uniquely enjoys as the second person of the Trinity in his ongoing human career. It is in this sense that the human unitive drive of Christ is also Trinitarian-human: it is a human disposition unique to the incarnate Son and is not naturally available to any created being who does not also enjoy the intra-Trinitarian communion as an uncreated person of the Trinity.<sup>281</sup> For this reason, the human unitive drive of Christ can also be conceived as the *sui generis* unitive drive of Trinitarian Sonship in human form. Hence, in this way, the human life of Christ functions as the only way into the intra-Trinitarian life of God for humanity. Were it not for the incarnation together with the Spirit's work of empowering Christ's perfect human love towards the Father and mediating an aspect of that love to us, we would have no way of participating in the intra-Trinitarian communion of Sonship in a humanly suitable manner.<sup>282</sup> The incarnation thus opens up a path for mankind into the eternal Trinitarian life through the man Jesus – a participation that would otherwise be impossible. Therefore, in sharing his human unitive drive with the church, Christ thereby also shares with her a power of appreciation, perception and enjoyment of the Father that only the begotten Son in human form can.

The preceding conclusion, however, raises another potential issue regarding the indwelling of the Spirit. In our modified account, we take the content of the Spirit's infusion

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moral demand of the law but fails to give proper weight to his unique life of Sonship. The benefits that Christ bestows on the church are far greater than his perfect satisfaction of the law's moral demands which in principle can be satisfied by any created human person. Instead, the life believers partake of is Christ's unique and sinless life as the only Son – a life that cannot be lived by any created persons, regardless of how perfectly obedient they may be. Canlis (2004), pp.178-179.

<sup>281</sup> A parallel point has been made by Kathryn Tanner. She argues that "the life of the Word is constituted by its dynamic relationships with the other members of the Trinity from which it is inseparable; the Word has no life apart from the other two. In becoming incarnate the Word therefore extends this same pattern of Trinitarian relationships into its own human life so as to give it shape according to that pattern". Tanner's claim supports my point that even in the incarnation the human character, disposition and psychological life of Christ is profoundly influenced by the divine intra-Trinitarian relationships in a way no other created beings can. Tanner (2010), p.140.

<sup>282</sup> The same point is made by Calvin. He states that "we are the sons of God, because the natural Son of God assumed to himself a body of our body, flesh of our flesh, bones of our bones, that he might be one with us". *Institutes*, 2.12.2.

to be the human unitive drive of Christ rather than the Spirit's own psychological states or dispositions. By making such a move, it seems that the person of the Spirit is made less intimately related and present to believers than in Alston's and Edwards' original models. However, this is not necessarily the case. The humanity of Christ, including his human love for the Father, may very well be formed, sustained and empowered by the divine Spirit who functions as the mutual bond and love between the Father and the Son.<sup>283</sup> Understood in this manner, the infusion of the human unitive drive of Christ could also, in some sense, be construed as the indirect impartation of the Spirit's disposition of love as it is worked out and mediated in and through the humanity of Christ. To be sure, on this modified model, the sharing of the Spirit's disposition of love with believers is not as direct and immediate as on Edwards' and Alston's proposals. Nevertheless, it still allows for a kind of mediated presence of the Spirit's loving disposition within the deepest being of the saints via the Spirit-filled incarnate humanity of Christ.

### 3.4 Summation

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide a model for understanding the indwelling of the Spirit in sanctifying (or infusive) grace by modifying and expanding upon Edwards' theological psychology. I began the task by examining Edwards' theological conception of indwelling grace and Alston's philosophically oriented model of indwelling. The accounts provided by them turn out to be highly complementary of one another and could be fruitfully brought together to serve as an illuminating model for the theological psychology of

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<sup>283</sup> Various proposals for a 'Spirit Christology' have indeed argued that the humanity of Christ is in some way constituted by the Spirit, including Edwards' own proposal. Del Colle defines 'Spirit Christology' as the view that "the Holy Spirit is attributed a constitutive role in the theological and soteriological reality that we identify as the person and work of Jesus Christ". For a treatment of Edwards' 'Spirit Christology' refer to Seng-Kong Tan's insightful discussion. For various arguments in favour of a 'Spirit Christology' refer to Chapter 4-6 of Myk Habets' work. Del Colle (1993), p.95. Tan (2010), pp.127-150. Habets (2010).

indwelling. However, despite its promise there are substantial philosophical and theological difficulties with their proposals which come down to the problems and implications of a literal and direct union between divinity and humanity. Nevertheless, the difficulties could be avoided if we take the mediatory role of Christ's humanity more seriously and conceive the indwelling grace of sanctification primarily as an infusion of Christ's human unitive drive through the Holy Spirit's abiding presence within his people. This modification and expansion of the Edwards-Alston's synthesis of infusive grace thus provides a coherent and enlightening model for understanding the theological, psychological and metaphysical dimension of the Spirit's indwelling.



## **Chapter Four: Spiritual Perception and the Normative Divine Address in Scripture**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Having focused on the infusion of grace in the last chapter, we now turn our attention to the second major component in Edwards' theory of spiritual perception and consider its significance for a contemporised account of spiritual perception. As foundational as the doctrine of infusion is to Edwards' theory, it is not the whole story. Significantly, we have yet to consider the role of the Christian Scripture in spiritual perception and the formation of spiritual delight. For Edwards, Scripture plays an important role in one's transformation and spiritual perception of divine holiness. Grace is infused within believers so that the regenerate can perceive the glory and beauty of the great gospel truths that Scripture proclaims.<sup>284</sup> Hence, in this chapter and the next, we will spend some time considering the nature of Scripture and what it means to understand it in a transformative manner. Subsequently, in chapters six and seven, we will then bring together our discussion on Scripture and infused grace and consider their relationship with spiritual delight and perception. The final goal is to articulate a contemporary account of spiritual perception that could serve as an illuminating model to better understand the theological psychology of transforming grace. With this outline in mind, we shall begin our discussion with Edwards' view of Scripture's role in spiritual perception.

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<sup>284</sup> The intimate relationship between Scripture as the word of God and the infused Spirit is well summed up by Conrad Cherry when he commented that "for Edwards also, Word and Spirit, the objective and the subjective aspects of religious faith, function as "one term". The Spirit, the inward divine possibility of faith is the Worded Spirit; and the Word, the outward divine point of orientation of faith, is the Spirited Word." Cherry (1966), p.45.

## 4.2 Word and Spirit in Edwards

Unlike many contemporary scholars, Edwards did not set his theology of Scripture under the category of prolegomena, historical-criticism, hermeneutics or anthropology, but firmly within the broader spectrum of soteriology.<sup>285</sup> The final goal of Scriptural reading is not merely the accumulation of religiously significant propositions and knowledge but the transformation of one's love from idols to the eternal Triune God.<sup>286</sup> From this perspective, the reading of Scripture is thus inseparable from the wider transforming work of God within the economy of grace. For Edwards, Scripture is the primary instrument of God's saving grace that transforms the elect from sinners to saints in communion with him.<sup>287</sup>

Edwards situates the transforming power of Scripture within his doctrine of spiritual understanding and assigns it an important role within that account. He teases out this doctrine by first making an important distinction between "spiritual understanding" and a mere "notional understanding" of Scripture, with the key difference between the two being a kind of sensible experience. Spiritual understanding is an understanding of Scripture that involves a "sensibleness of sweetness and delight" regarding the supreme goodness and "moral beauty" of God that inclines our will. In contrast, mere notional understanding is an affectively detached way of understanding Scripture that lacks the sensible affective phenomenology and volitional engagement of spiritual understanding.<sup>288</sup> In other words, what differentiates a mere notional understanding from a spiritual understanding of Scripture is "the sense of the heart".

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<sup>285</sup> Two notable contemporary works in the theology of Scripture that seek to recover this essential soteriological dimension of Scripture are *Living and Active* by Telford Work and *Holy Scripture* by John Webster. Webster (2003); Work (2001).

<sup>286</sup> Hence, he affirms the "Word of God as the principal means of carrying on God's work". "The Distinguishing Marks," in WJE 4:240.

<sup>287</sup> Edwards understands grace as divine love and Scripture as "the great and principal means of grace" that leads one to divine love. See "Sermon Fourteen: Divine Love Alone Lasts Eternally," in WJE 8:360.

<sup>288</sup> WJE 2:272-278.

Spiritual understanding or knowledge, for Edwards, is therefore simply another way of spelling out his foundational theory of spiritual perception while highlighting the vital role played by Scripture in his overall theory.<sup>289</sup> He held that

The means whereby this knowledge is communicated to us is his Word. And this is the only likely way ever to obtain this knowledge, to converse very much with the holy Word of God, frequently to read the holy Scriptures.<sup>290</sup>

As noted by Stephen Stein, Edwards affirms the Protestant emphasis that “it is the interaction of Word and Spirit that produces spiritual understanding”.<sup>291</sup> Edwards insists that spiritual understanding must be grounded in the truth of Scripture, without which there can be no real enlightenment of the mind.<sup>292</sup> However, he is also equally insistent that Scripture itself is not the proper cause of spiritual understanding. Thus, he asserts that

Indeed a person can’t have spiritual light without the Word. But that don’t argue that the Word properly causes that light. The mind can’t see the excellency of any doctrine, unless that doctrine be first in the mind but the seeing the excellency of the doctrine may be immediately from the Spirit of God.<sup>293</sup>

According to Edwards, although Scripture is necessary for spiritual understanding, it is nevertheless a “dead letter” without the Spirit.<sup>294</sup> The Spirit of God is the proper cause of spiritual understanding since it is the Spirit infused within the saints that allows them to perceive the beauty and glory of God that Scripture presents.<sup>295</sup> In other words, it is the Spirit

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<sup>289</sup> The doctrines of spiritual understanding and knowledge, spiritual perception, and religious affections are all deeply interconnected in Edwards’ thinking. In the editor’s introduction to *Religious Affections*, John Smith highlights the intimate connections between Edwards’ account of understanding in the mind, the work of the Spirit in the heart, and his doctrine of religious affections. Smith notes that the main point about Edwards’ gracious affections is that they “are those based upon a certain type of understanding or knowledge which is called “spiritual.” “He refused to oppose the religious conception of spirit to intellectual pursuits, and he did not join forces with popular revivalism, which sets understanding over the “having of the spirit.”” Smith (1959), p.31.

<sup>290</sup> “A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate,” in WJE 14:89.

<sup>291</sup> Stein (1977), p.109.

<sup>292</sup> WJE 2:268.

<sup>293</sup> “Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17:416.

<sup>294</sup> WJE 13:340.

<sup>295</sup> This is also essentially the way Edwards thought about the divine illumination of Scripture, and it serves as the foundational framework for his thinking about the epistemology of Scripture. Robert Brown observes that “Like other theologians in the Reformed tradition, Edwards believed that there was an inherent

that “immediately” brings about the sense of the heart that is constitutive of spiritual understanding.

In an important *Miscellanies* entry on *means of grace*, Edwards elaborates on the relationship between Word and Spirit in his thinking. He argues that Scripture or Word has “no influence to produce grace” but merely functions as a means for the Spirit of God to bring about the transformative work of spiritual understanding.<sup>296</sup> In making the assertion that Scripture has “no influence to produce grace”, Edwards meant to limit the role of Scripture in spiritual understanding in two important aspects. First, Scripture does not causally contribute to the existence of the supernatural principle within the hearts of the regenerate. Second, Scripture has no causal influence in the “acting of grace” – that is, Scripture does not in any way causally contribute to the regenerate’s experience of the gracious affections (i.e., the spiritual sense of the heart) towards the divine excellencies.

The above two restrictions upon the role of Scripture in spiritual understanding are a consequence of an important point regarding Edwards’ view on the causation of grace. Edwards disallows the natural capacities or powers of Scripture to have any kind of causal involvement in the formation of the gracious principle within a person’s heart or the formation of the gracious affections. The only kind of causal involvement he would allow Scripture is that of providing the understanding with the “subject matter” and notions of the Christian doctrines.<sup>297</sup> The cause for the spiritual sense of the doctrines’ divine excellency, however, is strictly reserved for the Holy Spirit alone. Therefore, the role of Scripture in the experience of the spiritual sense is limited to that of simply providing suitable ideas and notions in a person’s mind for grace (i.e., the Holy Spirit) to act upon.

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“impress of divine excellence” on the Christian revelation, one that corresponded to and resonated with the renewed faculties of the regenerate mind and that provided it with an unwavering epistemological certitude. This was the earliest and never-abandoned foundation of Edwards’s biblical epistemology.” Brown (2002), p.82.

<sup>296</sup> WJE 18:85-88.

<sup>297</sup> “Divine and Supernatural Light,” in WJE 17:416.

Despite Edwards' insistence that Scripture has no "influence to produce grace", he affirms Scripture as the "principal means of grace".<sup>298</sup> What this affirmation ultimately amounts to, in his thinking, is that Scripture is the primary means of supplying the mind with suitable mental "matter" or ideas for the Spirit to freely "act upon" to generate spiritual light and perception.<sup>299</sup> So vital is the presence of this suitable mental matter which Scripture provides that Edwards thinks God normally does not infuse his grace in the soul where there is no suitable "matter" in the mind. Nevertheless, the ideas that Scripture supplies cannot in any way provide a person with a sense of spiritual delight or affection towards those ideas. The formation of the gracious affections is again causally attributed to the Spirit of God alone. Understood in such a way, Edwards sees the ideas that Scripture affords as merely creating a suitable opportunity for the Spirit of God to operate as he wills and generate the "sense of the heart" that is characteristic of the spiritual understanding of Scripture.<sup>300</sup> Therefore, in this manner, Edwards is able to limit the causal influence of Scripture in the experience of the spiritual sense and affirm that the Spirit of God alone is the proper cause for the gracious affections of the heart.

It would be a mistake, however, to thereby conclude that for Edwards, a spiritual understanding of Scripture is simply affective understanding. That would be to miss the thoroughly pneumatological character of spiritual understanding. The ideas that Scripture signifies could very well be affective in nature and need not be limited to merely notional or speculative ideas. The crucial difference between spiritual and non-spiritual understanding is not equivalent to a difference between an affective and non-affective understanding of Scripture. Instead, it amounts to a difference between a supernatural (i.e., spiritual) affective understanding and a natural understanding which may or may not be affective in nature.

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<sup>298</sup> WJE 18:84. Cf. "Divine Love Alone," in WJE 8:360.

<sup>299</sup> WJE 18:85.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p.84.

Edwards held that there are “natural principles of heart” which could provide “a sense of the natural good or evil of those things that the mind has a notion, or speculative idea of”.<sup>301</sup> Hence, Scripture as a means of grace may very well appeal to these natural principles of the heart to bring about various natural affections towards the ideas of religion. However, these natural affections are qualitatively distinct from the supernatural or holy affections of spiritual understanding that stem from the “supernatural principle of heart” infused by the Holy Spirit. The supernatural affections experienced by the saints in spiritual understanding are “vastly more excellent” and “entirely different” in their “nature and kind, from anything that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified” and hence are not reducible to the natural affections.<sup>302</sup> Nevertheless, Edwards held that the supernatural principle of heart does not simply replace the natural principles but instead exists alongside the natural principles within the saints. The natural principles of heart serve to prepare, amplify and deepen the effect of the supernatural principles and render the resultant affective experience richer “than otherwise would be”.<sup>303</sup> The natural principles of heart hence do not compete with the supernatural principle but rather have their own proper complementary role to play in the spiritual understanding of Scripture.

Spiritual understanding, according to Edwards, is therefore formed by an “interaction of Word and Spirit” to bring about a supernatural spiritual delight towards the excellency of God and his works.<sup>304</sup> Spiritual understanding of this sort is also for him profoundly transformative in nature, in virtue of the experience of spiritual delight inherent in such an understanding. This new delight or relish captivates the hearts of the saints and consequently brings about a radical change in their motivations, inclinations and attitudes towards divine realities.

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., p.87.

<sup>302</sup> WJE 2:205.

<sup>303</sup> WJE 18:88.

<sup>304</sup> Stein (1977), p.109.

### 4.3 Jenson's Criticism of Edwards

Edwards' conception of the relationship between Word and Spirit has sometimes been criticised by theologians for divesting the Christian Scripture of its transformative power. Of particular note is Robert Jenson's important study where he points out that Edwards does not "give the word of the gospel the ontological weight of the transforming Spirit."<sup>305</sup> As we have seen, Edwards conceives of Scripture as having "no influence to produce grace".<sup>306</sup> On this Edwardsean view, the divine transformative power and grace is located in the infused disposition and not Scripture. Scripture merely provides a suitable occasion or opportunity for God's arbitrary work of transformation but does not play any integral causal role in bringing about the spiritual transformation of believers. He does not even see Scripture as providing the sufficient conditions for spiritual perception or transformation. God as sovereign Spirit can freely and arbitrarily choose to act or not to act upon the ideas supplied by Scripture to effect grace in the hearts of her hearers. Hence, Edwards contends that "the means of grace have no influence to work grace, but only give such notions to our minds, and so disposed, as to give opportunity for grace to act, when God shall infuse it".<sup>307</sup>

A major contributing factor to Edwards' downplaying of Scripture's role in generating the gracious affections is his Lockean understanding of the way language functions.<sup>308</sup> Locke espouses a referential theory of language where words function as the fundamental building blocks for linguistic meaning. In the *Essay*, he maintains that

Words in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind of him that uses them, how imperfectly soever or carelessly those Ideas are collected from the Things, which they are supposed to represent. When a Man speaks

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<sup>305</sup> Jenson (1988), p.187.

<sup>306</sup> WJE 18:84.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>308</sup> This is not a point explicitly considered by Jenson; however, in my view, it is an important one.

to another, it is, that he may be understood; and the end of Speech is, that those Sounds, as Marks, may make known his Ideas to the hearer.<sup>309</sup>

Edwards broadly follows this Lockean view and applies it to his doctrine of spiritual understanding. Hence, in *Miscellanies* 782, he lays out his view of language use in Scripture as a series of signs that signifies various ideas in the mind. From there, he ventures on to argue that readers of Scripture often do not have the actual signified ideas in the mind when they encounter the signs that signify them. What happens in such cases is that the signs are used to stand in for the actual ideas they signify, resulting in a situation where the signs are grasped or used in a way where the actual ideas they represent are not “present” in the mind. Edwards calls this mode of language use “mere cogitation”.<sup>310</sup> In contrast, he observes that there is another mode of linguistic engagement where signs are grasped or used in a way where “the mind has a direct ideal view or contemplation of the thing thought of.” He calls this “ideal apprehension” and characterises it as a way of reading Scripture where the mind of the reader goes beyond the signs to “view the things themselves by the actual presence of their ideas”.<sup>311</sup> For Edwards, such ideal apprehension of Scripture is only possible with the gracious “sense of the heart” through which the regenerate are able to have the appropriate affective experiences to form the actual ideas of divine realities in their minds.

From the above Edwardsean perspective, one can better appreciate why Edwards has a tendency to downplay the role of Scripture in spiritual perception. Edwards desires to ground the causality of transforming grace firmly and exclusively in God. However, on his Lockean view of language, Scripture is merely a collection of signs that stand in for the unspeakable divine glory which is found only in the Holy Spirit and not the empty signs that simply signify the glorious life-changing divine realities. Thus, Scripture as mere signs is not

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<sup>309</sup> Locke (1975), p.405.

<sup>310</sup> WJE 18:458.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.



the divine reality and therefore cannot have any kind of divine transforming power. The aim of Scriptural reading is to move beyond the signs, by the power of the Spirit, to encounter the actual transformative divine reality. Therefore, even if signs are necessary for humanity to perceive the actual divine reality, they are merely an unavoidable means that one must pass through in order to arrive at something other than the signs. Indeed, according to Edwards, one cannot remain at the level of signs but must venture beyond the signs, through the infusion of the Spirit, to view the life-changing divine reality that lies behind the signs.

#### 4.4 Edwards' Recovery of the Word

Jenson is critical of Edwards' account of the relationship between Word and Spirit. He observes that despite Edwards' high view of Scripture,<sup>312</sup> he ultimately reduces it to "a device by which God gives us information about himself – information that he may or may not turn into communion with us".<sup>313</sup> Such a view essentially makes the word of God extrinsic to the believers' transformative communion with him and fails to "recognize the word's metaphysical weight".<sup>314</sup>

Nevertheless, Jenson is able to discern an important shift in Edwards' doctrine of Scripture late in his life. He notes that in Edwards' latter years, he introduces the category of "conversation" to his thinking about the word of God and argues, in the late *Miscellanies* entry 1388<sup>315</sup>, that the believers' communion with God is constituted by such

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<sup>312</sup> Edwards, like many in the Puritan tradition, has a high regard for Scripture and affirms its authority, sufficiency, harmony, divine inspiration and origins. For a treatment of Edwards' view on these issues, see Schweitzer (2012), pp.81-102.

<sup>313</sup> Jenson (1988), pp.191-192.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., p.194.

<sup>315</sup> WJE 23:345-355.

conversations.<sup>316</sup> As noted by Jenson, Edwards came to affirm that ““God’s word on his part, and prayer on ours” are no longer mere means of our fellowship with God, they are the communion between us”.<sup>317</sup> For the mature Edwards, Scripture as the word of God is no longer composed of mere signs that signify some other reality or ideas, but it is now part of the very reality of the transformative communion with God. In Jenson’s evaluation, Edwards has recovered “the word’s metaphysical weight” by taking communion with God as being actualised in mutual conversation through the medium of words.<sup>318</sup>

One important point of what Jenson is highlighting in Edwards’ discovery of the significance of Scripture as conversation is the discursive aspect of the Word. Scripture is God speaking. Although this has always been part of Edwards’ understanding of Scripture, its significance was never really well integrated into his theory of spiritual perception.<sup>319</sup> His understanding of Scripture with regard to spiritual perception remains largely overshadowed by the conception of Scripture as impotent “signs” that have “no influence to work grace”.<sup>320</sup> As noted by Jenson, even though Edwards did undergo a significant reorientation in his understanding of Scripture late in life, he never had the chance to retrospectively rework his theory of spiritual perception with respect to his newfound insight. Therefore, his original theory remains lacking in this aspect.

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<sup>316</sup> The concept of “conversation” between God and man is already present in his earlier writings. However, it is usually tied to his thinking on prayer and devotional communion with God and not explicitly to his account of linguistic signs and Scriptural understanding. Moreover, the significance and import of conversation was also not as thoroughly explored as in his later writings. For instance, see “True Love to God,” in WJE 10:640-641.

<sup>317</sup> Jenson (1988), p.193.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., p.194. Cf. WJE 23:350.

<sup>319</sup> Even in his earlier sermons, Edwards affirms that “In the Bible, we not only have those warnings which were given by inspiration of the prophets, but we have God’s own words, which he spake as it were by his own mouth. In the Old Testament is his voice out of the midst of the fire and the darkness, from mount Sinai; and in the New Testament, we have God speaking to us, as dwelling among us”. Nevertheless, this discursive aspect of Scripture was not well integrated with his account of spiritual understanding which relied heavily on a conception of Scripture as linguistic signs. “The Warnings of Scripture Are in the Best Manner Adapted to the Awakening and Conversion of Sinners,” in WJE 47:333.

<sup>320</sup> WJE 18:85.

Our aim for the rest of the chapter is to further Edwards' recovery of the word and consider the role of Scripture as divine speech in spiritual perception and the transformation of her readers by interacting with one of the most important works on this issue in recent theological scholarship. The purpose here is to explore one of Edwards' important insights in *Miscellanies 1338* – that Scripture functions as a vehicle for God's speech – and relate it to the contemporised account of spiritual perception and transforming grace developed in the previous chapters. In doing so, we hope to provide a modernised account of spiritual perception that gives Scripture a transformative potency that was lacking in Edwards' own.

#### 4.5 A Speech-Act Approach to Scripture

One of the most influential and creative discussions on the subject of divine speaking in Scripture is Nicolas Wolterstorff's 1993 Wilde Lectures, published in 1995.<sup>321</sup> Since its publication, Wolterstorff's work has sparked a host of literature on the area of Scripture and speech-act theory and is partially responsible for the recent explosion of interest in utilising speech-act theory for biblical interpretation and the theology of Scripture.<sup>322</sup> Central to his account of divine speech via the Bible is the subjection of all Scripture under the philosophical category of speech-acts. In doing so, he managed to pave a creative path for thinking about the relationship between Scripture and the central theistic notion of a speaking God in a way seldom explored by theologians. Before we delve into the specifics of his account, it would be helpful to provide some background on speech-act theory – a philosophical theory that is foundational to the entire Wolterstorffian enterprise.

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<sup>321</sup> Wolterstorff (1995).

<sup>322</sup> See, for example, Briggs (2001); Horton (2002); Vanhoozer (1998); Vanhoozer (2002); Ward (2002).

#### 4.5.1 A Brief Introduction to Speech-Act Theory

The emergence of speech-act theory is usually traced to J.L. Austin's<sup>323</sup> work in ordinary language philosophy although prototypes of the theory can already be seen in the earlier works of Anton Marty<sup>324</sup>, Adolf Reinach<sup>325</sup> and even as early as Thomas Reid<sup>326, 327</sup>. In his most influential book, *How to Do Things with Words*, published posthumously, Austin argues that often the point of speaking is not to describe or state something but to do certain things.<sup>328</sup> This concept of doing things with one's utterances forms the core tenant of speech-act theory. It is fundamentally the view that "the uttering of a sentence is, or is part of, an action within the framework of social institutions and conventions."<sup>329</sup> Hence, for instance, under certain appropriate circumstances when a judge utters the sentence "I hereby adjourn the session", he would have performed the action of adjourning the court session via the utterance. Such actions that are performed via linguistic utterances or statements are termed speech-acts by Austin. Austin's analysis of performative speech-acts eventually led him to provide a well-known threefold classification of acts that are involved in ordinary language use: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

- (1) The locutionary act is the act of uttering something and it includes the phonetic act ("the act of uttering of certain noises"), the phatic act (the uttering of certain words as belonging to "a certain vocabulary" and "as conforming to a certain grammar"), and

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<sup>323</sup> The foundational text of Austin's speech-act theory is "How to Do Things with Words". Austin (1975).

<sup>324</sup> Marty (2010).

<sup>325</sup> Reinach (1983).

<sup>326</sup> For a treatment of the rudimentary elements of speech-act theory in Thomas Reid, see Smith (1990a).

<sup>327</sup> For an insightful and succinct history of speech-act theory, see Smith (1990), pp.29-61.

<sup>328</sup> Austin (1975), p.1.

<sup>329</sup> Huang (2010), p.705.

the rhetic act (the utterance of words “with a certain more-or-less definite sense and reference”).<sup>330</sup>

- (2) The illocutionary act is the act performed in performing a locutionary act.<sup>331</sup> It is the act that determines the manner in which a locution is being used. For instance, one may warn another in uttering the locution “Be careful!” The uttering of the locution is the locutionary act while the act of warning is the illocutionary act.
- (3) The perlocutionary act is the act of achieving certain effects or responses in the hearer by performing an illocutionary act. Examples of such acts include misleading, alarming or convincing another. It is typically the act of producing “certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or other persons” through the understanding of what is being said.<sup>332</sup>

In addition to the tripartite distinction of acts, Austin also introduced the concept of the illocutionary force. His original account of illocutionary force was not very clear and could be understood in a variety of ways. The broad idea he was trying to convey with the concept is that the illocutionary force of an utterance determines the way in which the locutionary act functions. For instance, the locutionary act of uttering “take this” could function as an act of asking or commanding. The intended illocutionary force of the speaker in making that utterance, as a request or command, determines how that utterance is to be understood and defines the illocutionary act performed in that utterance. Hence, illocutionary force has more to do with the action component of language use than the syntactic structure of language. It is

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<sup>330</sup> Austin (1975), p.95.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., p.99.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., pp.101, 119.

also one of the factors which define the illocutionary act as a distinctive act where the illocutionary act is the act of issuing a locution with a certain force (e.g., the force of a request, command or warning).<sup>333</sup> Austin initially made a distinction between performatives and constatives, the former being utterances or statements used to perform certain actions, while the latter are utterances or statements used to describe states of affairs. However, this distinction was later given up and replaced with a general theory of speech-acts where performatives and constatives were both viewed as speech-acts differing only in their illocutionary force.<sup>334</sup>

Another important feature of Austin's work is his analysis of the different strata of linguistic behaviour.<sup>335</sup> An illocutionary act is performed by way of performing a locutionary act. A locutionary act is in turn performed by way of performing a rhetic act, and a rhetic act by way of a phatic act, and a phatic act by way of a phonetic act. These distinct kinds of linguistic actions form different layers of linguistic action that are nested within the layer above it. Moreover, each layer of linguistic action is a distinct kind of linguistic behaviour and should not be conflated together. Hence, for example, to utter certain noises (the phonetic act) is a distinct kind of action from saying something (the illocutionary act), even if one says something by uttering certain noises.

Following Austin's foundational work, speech-act theory has been further developed in several distinct directions, notably, by John Searle, Paul Grice, William Alston, Kent Bach and others. Nevertheless, they all continue to share in the central tenets of the theory that Austin proposed:

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., pp.98-101.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., p.139.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., pp.92-99.

- (1) The performance of a speech-act via “the uttering of a sentence is, or is part of, an action within the framework of social institutions and conventions.”<sup>336</sup>
- (2) Language use is not limited to describing or signifying certain states of affairs but is often used to perform a variety of actions.
- (3) The importance of the notion of agency in understanding an utterance.
- (4) The distinction between the different levels or strata of action in linguistic behaviour.

#### 4.5.2 Deputised and Appropriated Speech-acts

With this brief overview of speech-act theory, we will now return to consider how the theory is utilised in Wolterstorff’s account of Scripture. His basic contention is that Scripture can and does function as a medium for divine speech-acts. To support his conclusion, he develops the seldom explored phenomena of ‘deputised’ and ‘appropriated’ speech-acts. Since these are important concepts in Wolterstorff’s account, let us examine them in some depth.

According to Wolterstorff, discourse is deputised if an illocutionary act performed by an individual is by means of authorising or commissioning another individual to perform a locutionary act that counts as the illocutionary act of the former individual.<sup>337</sup> For instance, the president of a nation may deputise the vice-president to speak in his name about a certain issue. With such an arrangement, the locutionary act of the vice-president would then count as the illocutionary act of the president under the appropriate circumstances. When functioning as the deputy to the president, the vice-president need not use the president’s exact words in the deputised discourse. He is often given the freedom to craft the discourse in a manner that he sees fit. The degree of freedom and superintendence given to the deputy

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<sup>336</sup> Huang (2010), p.705.

<sup>337</sup> Wolterstorff (1995), pp.42-45.

may vary from case to case, often depending on the relationship between the one who deputises and the deputy. On one end, the discourser may produce the text herself or dictate it to the deputy verbatim. On the other end, the deputy may be given complete freedom to craft the message in whatever manner he deems appropriate.

Wolterstorff thinks that many of the biblical prophecies in Scripture, where the prophet is speaking in the name of God, are a kind of deputised discourse. The prophet is authorised by God to speak on his behalf and the locutionary acts of the prophet count as God's illocutionary acts. The prophet may also be given a significant amount of freedom to craft the prophetic message in his own words and literary style. This freedom does not undermine the divine illocutionary act in any way since what matters, at the end of the day, is that the message is authorised and commissioned by God so that the prophet's locution counts as a divine illocutionary act. In addition, Wolterstorff also allows that the prophet may perform illocutionary acts of his own when being deputised to speak on behalf of God. In such cases, he would typically make it explicit to his hearers that this is his own voice speaking and not that of God. Moreover, it is equally possible that the prophet's locutionary act may count as his own illocutionary act and as God's illocutionary act simultaneously.<sup>338</sup> For instance, the prophet may issue the locution "Israel will be judged if she does not repent!", and such a locution may simultaneously be God's illocutionary act via deputising the prophet to speak for him and the prophet's own illocutionary act of warning to his fellow countrymen. The single locutionary act could count as the prophet's and God's speech-act at the same time.

Wolterstorff is well aware that much of Scripture is not in the form of biblical prophecies and hence would not fall under the category of deputised discourse. To account for the manner in which these other genres and Scripture as a whole could function as a

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p.45.



medium for divine speech, he appeals to the category of appropriated speech-acts.

Appropriated speech-acts occur when the discourser encounters a certain discourse and says “this is also what I want to say”<sup>339</sup> or “I agree with him” and in doing so appropriates the discourse as his own. According to Wolterstorff, in such cases, “one’s own discourse is a function of that other person’s discourse.”<sup>340</sup>

Appropriated discourse differs from deputised discourse in two important ways. First, to appropriate another person’s discourse does not require any deputising, authorising or commissioning by the discourser in the way that deputised discourse requires.<sup>341</sup> The discourser could appropriate the discourse of another without having any special relationship with the person whose discourse he appropriates. Second, appropriated discourses are inherently double discourses (discourse which involves two distinct discourses that relate in a certain way), but deputised discourse may or may not involve double discourses.<sup>342</sup> For example, when the President commissions and authorises his secretary to produce and sign an official memo on his behalf, the secretary may completely disagree with the memo produced. When asked if she had said whatever the memo describes, she could rightly deny it. In a case where she disagrees with the President, the secretary would have performed the locutionary act of crafting the memo but not the illocutionary act of asserting the contents of the memo; the secretary had not said anything by way of crafting the memo. This is an instance of deputised speech-act which does not involve double discourses. The only discourser involved is the President. However, appropriated speech-acts of the “I agree with him” kind are inherently double discourses. When one appropriates another person’s discourse by saying “I second what was said”, the discourser not only appropriates the locutionary act of another but also the illocutionary act. It is the speech-act that is appropriated as opposed to merely the

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<sup>339</sup> This particular appropriating phrase is coined by Maarten Wise. Wisse (2002), p.171.

<sup>340</sup> Wolterstorff (1995), p.52.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

locutionary act (as is the case for the President and his secretary example). Therefore, appropriated speech-acts are inherently double discourses but not so for deputised speech-acts. A consequence of this is that for instances of appropriated discourse, “what the second person says is determined, in good measure, by what the first person said”.<sup>343</sup> If I appropriate the entire speech-act of another and not merely the locutionary act, one has to figure out what the original discourse is about before one can know what I am saying by way of appropriating that speech-act. This characteristic of appropriated speech-act will play an important role in Wolterstorff’s account of divine discourse as we shall see later.

In addition to deputised and appropriated speech-acts, three other important features of appropriated speech-acts ought to be noted for our purposes. First, the content of the appropriating speech may or may not differ with the content of the appropriated speech.<sup>344</sup> For example, John says “I think Obama will win the elections” and Peter appropriates John’s speech by saying “I agree with what was said”. Peter, in appropriating John’s speech, is not saying that John thinks Obama will win the elections but that he (Peter) thinks that Obama will win. Often, the propositional content expressed in the original speech-act changes when it is appropriated by another person. Discerning how the propositional content has been altered requires attention to the manner of the appropriation and the context of the discourse.<sup>345</sup> Second, it is possible that the appropriating discourser may “want to embrace the main point but not all the incidentals”<sup>346</sup> of the appropriated discourse. Third, the appropriating discourse need not absorb the entire or any of the illocutionary force of the appropriated discourse.<sup>347</sup> For instance, suppose that the prophet Nathan had heard the story about the rich man from another person, Jones, who asserted to the prophet of such a

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., p.53.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

narration that actually happened to him. Subsequently, Nathan in his discourse to King David could have appropriated Jones' narration without thereby asserting that the events of the story were actual. Jones' discourse may function as a moral parable in Nathan's discourse to David. If that were the case, Nathan would be performing a distinct illocutionary act with a distinct illocutionary force from that of Jones' in his appropriation of Jones' assertive narration.<sup>348</sup>

#### 4.5.3 Divine Discourse in Scripture

With the concept of appropriated discourse in hand, Wolterstorff goes on to suggest that the whole of Scripture can be considered a kind of appropriated divine discourse. On his proposal, God appropriates the various disparate human and deputised divine discourses (prophetic discourses) into his one single and distinct work in Scripture for his own divine discourse. For Wolterstorff, what ultimately makes Scripture the one work (or single corpus) of God is not its theological or literary theme, narrative structure, content, canon, inspiration, or even its divine authorship. The deepest basis for its unity is that God has "authorised this totality of words as a single work".<sup>349</sup> The diverse writings of Scripture – with its various authors, literary style, and historical identity – are "all together appropriated into a text which is one single book" by God and serves as a medium for his divine discourse.<sup>350</sup> Appropriated divine speech-acts, for Wolterstorff, thus form the conceptual foundation for understanding Scripture as God's discourse and its unity.

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<sup>348</sup> Maarten Wisse's criticism of Wolterstorff is hence mistaken. He argues that in appropriating the illocutionary act of another, the appropriating discourses "perform the same illocutionary act in their own discourse". He then claims that this is in tension with Wolterstorff's position of allowing the appropriated illocutionary act to count as another distinct illocutionary act. However, there is simply no reason why the appropriating discourses must perform the same illocutionary act as the appropriated illocutionary act. An example may help to clarify the point. A person may perform an apology by appropriating three distinct assertions from three separate discourses. The appropriating discourse has appropriated the illocutionary act of another without performing the same illocutionary. Wisse has thus misunderstood the concept of appropriated discourse. Wisse (2002), p.169.

<sup>349</sup> Wolterstorff (2004), p.224.

<sup>350</sup> Wolterstorff (1995), p.54; *ibid.*

According to Wolterstorff, the divine appropriation of human speech-acts does not in any way undermine the academic discipline of biblical studies. He argues that to discern the divine appropriating speech-act requires one to understand what the original human discourse is about. Therefore, biblical studies remains an important and integral discipline for the task of attending to the divine discourse in Scripture. Nevertheless, he admits that the move from the original human discourse to the divine appropriating discourse may not be straightforward and calls for a hermeneutical discernment that goes beyond biblical studies.<sup>351</sup>

In addition to the above, the hermeneutical task of discerning God's voice in Scripture is also further complicated by the different levels of divine discourse embedded within the Bible. One interesting feature regarding Wolterstorff's philosophy of Scripture is that it allows for multiple distinct levels of divine discourse. On the historical level, God may have performed an act of divine discourse through the deputised speech-acts of the prophets to the people of Israel in antiquity. However, subsequently, he might have appropriated that historical divine discourse as part of another divine discourse or work in the Old Testament Hebrew Scripture. The Hebrew Scripture as a complete work could then be further divinely appropriated in the Christian Scripture as part of yet another larger work. The different layers of work embedded within Scripture could all function as mediums of divine discourse at various levels. Moreover, the illocutionary force and content of the appropriated divine discourse on the lower level may also be quite distinct from the appropriating divine discourse on a higher level. Therefore, the interpretation of each level of divine discourse will differ. This multi-layered complexity again calls for subtlety and attentiveness in interpreting Scripture as the voice of God.

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p.239.

#### 4.5.4 Listening to the Many Levels of Divine Discourse

If there are multiple levels of divine discourse within the Christian Scripture, which level of discourse ought one be listening to? Although Wolterstorff did not address this question explicitly, a reply could be inferred from his discussion about addressees, audiences, relevance and works. When one performs a speech-act, according to Wolterstorff, it typically involves an addressee. For instance, a warning is made to someone and a question is posed to somebody. These are all cases of speech-acts involving an addressee.<sup>352</sup> The notion of an audience, on the other hand, is distinct from that of an addressee. For Wolterstorff, “all who do hear or read the discourse (with some degree of understanding) might be called the audience of one’s discourse.”<sup>353</sup> An audience may be intended or unintended. It might also consist of a group that satisfies a certain condition. For example, the intended audience of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* may be anyone who claims to be a Christian.

The distinction between an addressee and audience is an important one and its fundamental difference can be seen through the following example. In a wedding ceremony, the groom recites the marriage vow to the bride in the presence of his family and friends. The vow is addressed to the bride alone and not to anyone else who might happen to hear it. Nevertheless, the groom intends that his vow be heard and understood by his family and friends who are his audiences. The addressee of the groom’s speech-act occupies a special place in the discourse in a way that the audience do not; the vow binds the groom to the addressee alone and not to anyone in the audience. Hence, the notion of an addressee is to be distinguished from the notion of an audience. With this in mind, it is worth noting that a single locutionary act could be used to perform multiple illocutionary acts to different

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., p.55.

addressees.<sup>354</sup> For example, I could use the phrase “I am on the phone with grandma” to order my children to lower their voices and request my wife to come to the phone simultaneously. In the same way, an epistle in the New Testament could be employed by the author to perform multiple distinct illocutionary acts to different addressees simultaneously with the exact same words. For instance, the author may use the single locution “Jesus is Lord” to encourage believers and warn the church’s persecutors simultaneously.<sup>355</sup>

In addition to the concepts of addressee and audience, another notion that is pertinent to our discussion is that of *relevance*. A discourse could be relevant to a person or community even though they are not the intended audience or addressee.<sup>356</sup> The implications or content of the discourse may be so broad as to be relevant for them even though they are not its intended audience or addressee. Moreover, relevance could also arise when there are clear similarities between the audience or addressee’s situation and one’s current situation, regardless of who the original audience might be.<sup>357</sup> Conversely, a discourse could be addressed to an individual without that person perceiving the relevance or significance of that address for her.

With the concepts of audience, addressee and relevance on hand, we can now return to the issue of which level of divine discourse Christians ought to be listening to. In answering this, there are a few preliminary points that should be noted in advance. First, as Wolterstorff remarks, there is worth and legitimacy in listening to all the levels of divine discourse that Scripture makes accessible to us.<sup>358</sup> Many of the divine discourses on the

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> The point that a single locution can serve multiple illocutionary acts has also been noted by other speech-act theorist, notably William Alston. He notes that “a given sentence can be used with one and the same meaning to perform illocutionary acts of indefinitely many types... This is because the sentence meaning by itself does not suffice to determine all the features of the illocutionary acts the sentence can be used to perform”. Alston (2000), p.188.

<sup>356</sup> Wolterstorff (1995), p.56.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>358</sup> Wolterstorff (2004), p.229.

historical level are relevant to Christians even though they may not be the discourses' original addressees or intended audiences since the content and implications of these historical divine discourses are sufficiently broad to render it relevant for Christians today.

The second point is that there are levels of divine discourse that are not only relevant but also address Christians of all time. Some of the New Testament writings could fall under such a category if we take some of the apostolic writings to be speaking in the name of God to the church throughout time. Moreover, these instances of divine address in themselves could function as isolated cases of divine speech or as part of a larger appropriated divine discourse that emerges at the level of the whole of Scripture considered as a single work.

Third, God in authoring the Scriptural canon intended the church to read the Christian Scripture as a unified singular whole and not as isolated instances of divine discourse. This point is of course not widely agreed upon in contemporary theology and biblical studies, but nevertheless it is part of the common confession of faith in various Christian traditions. Hence, I take it that there is some legitimacy in assuming this point.<sup>359</sup> In addition, such a claim also does not in any way undermine the suggestion that there is worth, relevance and legitimacy in listening to divine discourses on levels other than that of the whole. In fact, listening to divine discourses on the other levels could sometimes be essential to discerning the discourse on the level of the whole of Scripture.

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<sup>359</sup> Hence, in the Western theological tradition we have Augustine arguing that "everything both in the Old and in the New Testament was written and entrusted to us by the one Holy Spirit". Eric Plumer has also remarked that "an integral part of Augustine's belief in biblical inspiration is his view that Scripture is a single whole comprising both the Old Testament and the New. Rightly understood, both Testaments bear witness to the same faith." On the other end, the Eastern theologian, Georges Florovsky, observes that "it was no accident that a diverse anthology of writings, composed at various dates and by various writers, came to be regarded as a single book... the Bible is emphatically singular. The scriptures are indeed one Holy Scripture, one Holy Writ. There is one main theme and one main message through the whole story." Augustine (2006), p.180. Plumer (2003), p.95. Florovsky (1972), p.19.

Lastly, on a point related to the previous one: the church is called by God to faithful attentive hearing of his address to her in Scripture. John Webster, working from the Reformed tradition, has argued that

The definitive act of the church is faithful hearing of the gospel of salvation announced by the risen Christ in the Spirit's power through the service of Holy Scripture. As the *creatura verbi divini*, the creature of the divine Word, the church is the hearing church.<sup>360</sup>

For Webster, what the church is summoned to hear is nothing less than “God’s address to the church” in the entire canon of Holy Scripture.<sup>361</sup> In affirming this, Webster is of course not proposing anything new. The relationship between Scripture and church, as presented, is very much a part of the Reformed tradition. Hence, it was observed by Cornelius Van Der Kooi that for Calvin and Barth, knowledge of God through Scripture is fundamentally a kind of “relational knowing” where “the person does not so much become master of the thing known, but is addressed by and becomes conditioned by it.”<sup>362</sup> Therefore, I shall once again appeal to the theological tradition for justification in making this assertion.

With these points in mind, I suggest that Christians who are under the rule of God then ought to attend to the divine discourse at the level of the entire Christian Scripture. If we affirm, following Webster, that the church is an eschatological community addressed by God through the whole of Scripture and summoned to the task of attentiveness to that divine address, it is then essential for Christians who are caught up in God’s economy of grace to attend to the address of God to the church at the level of the entire Christian Scripture, if she is to be faithful to her calling. The Christian Scripture is ‘Christian’ significantly because it is God’s evangelical address to the community of Jesus Christ. If the church is to remain faithful to her lord and saviour, she must attend to the divine voice addressed to her.

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<sup>360</sup> Webster (2003), p.44.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., pp.64, 132.

<sup>362</sup> Van Der Kooi (2005), p.8.



Nevertheless, this does not imply that the other levels of divine discourse are not relevant to the church. God's address to the people of Israel at the historical level may have relevance and value for the church even if the discourse is not addressed to her. There clearly is value and worth in listening to the other levels of divine discourse for the church and there is no need to deny that. However, it must also be stressed that the key task of the church is to listen to the voice of God to her at the level of the entire Christian Scripture, and the divine discourses at the other levels may very well be relevant to this central task.

The above affirmation is not meant to exclude the possibility that God may be addressing other parties apart from the church at the level of the whole of Scripture. As mentioned, a single locutionary act could be used to perform multiple illocutionary acts addressed to different parties. Similarly, the diverse writings and discourses of the entire Christian Scripture could be appropriated by God to perform multiple distinct illocutionary acts each addressed to a distinct party. Hence, God, through the medium of the whole of Scripture, may have something slightly different to say to humanity in general, non-believers, Christians and the Jewish people. Even at the level of the whole of Scripture, there might yet be multiple divine discourses each with its distinct illocutionary action and addressee. Notwithstanding, this multiplicity does not alter the fact that the church is to attend obediently to God's discourse to her if she is to abide in her lord.

#### 4.6 Divine Illocutionary Acts and Normative Transformation

There is little doubt that Wolterstorff's proposal for understanding the Bible as divine discourse is one of the most creative treatments on Scripture in recent discussions. It opens up a whole new horizon for theological reflection about Scripture and hermeneutics in ways that are seldom explored in contemporary theology. What follows in the rest of the chapter is an

attempt to build upon his ground-breaking work and consider its potential for understanding the transforming power of Scripture. In particular, we will turn our attention to the relationship between the divine illocutionary acts of God and the normative aspect of transformation.

#### 4.6.1 The Normative Nature of Illocutionary Acts

One of the central discussions in speech-act theory pertains to the nature of illocutionary acts. Specifically, it relates to the question of what turns a locutionary act into an illocutionary act. Within this conversation, Wolterstorff advances what he calls a “normative theory of discourse”, according to which the performance of a locutionary act counts as the performance of an illocutionary act by means of acquiring a “normative ascription of some normative standing” under a certain system of arrangement.<sup>363</sup>

Wolterstorff observes that society typically has a variety of systems of arrangements that come into effect either by stipulation or by convention. For instance, to take an example provided by Wolterstorff, there is a system of arrangement for drivers such that the action of switching on the left-side blinker counts as a signal for a left turn. This system of arrangement is a kind of stipulation or convention that all drivers have agreed to in some form. It is also an arrangement for acquiring certain rights and responsibilities for those involved in the social practice of driving. Hence, by signalling a left turn by means of switching on the left-side blinker under appropriate circumstances, I have acquired the rights and responsibilities of one who is about to make a left turn. Moreover, this acquisition of rights and responsibility is also a kind of normative standing under the system of arrangement, such that were I to signal left but then make a right turn, I would be subjected to normative

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<sup>363</sup> Wolterstorff (1995), p.85.

blame for not acting in accordance with the responsibilities of one who signalled left.

Similarly, if I were to signal left, I would have acquired the rights and standing of one who is about to turn left and other drivers would have to give way to me under appropriate circumstances such that failure to do so would incur normative blame on their part.<sup>364</sup> This assumption of a normative standing, with certain rights and responsibilities attached to it, is what Wolterstorff calls the acquiring of “a normative ascription of some normative standing”.<sup>365</sup>

The system of arrangement for acquiring a normative standing comes about as a result of a stipulation or convention in effect for certain persons at a certain given time. Wolterstorff does not see a deep distinction between stipulations and conventions. For him, a convention is a kind of stipulation that arises within society and could be seen as a sort of social stipulation.<sup>366</sup> Stipulations could be explicit or implicit. I could explicitly stipulate in advance to my wife that the action of pointing to my watch during the course of the dinner party counts as me saying “it is time to go home”. If my wife assents to my proposal, a system of arrangement in the form of explicit stipulations would be in place during the course of the dinner party. However, stipulations may often be implicit. Certain systems of arrangements and assent to those arrangements could arise organically within a community without any particular person explicitly stipulating the arrangement.

Wolterstorff argues that our performance of certain locutionary acts counts as the performance of certain illocutionary acts because of the linguistic system of arrangements or conventions in effect within a linguistic community.<sup>367</sup> This arrangement for the performance of speech actions is also an arrangement for the acquiring of certain rights and responsibilities

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid., p.84.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., p.91.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., pp.89-93.

as speaker and addressee. Hence, if I were to promise my wife to be back for dinner by uttering the sentence “I will be back for dinner”, the normative standing of having promised my wife to be back for dinner would be normatively ascribed to me. Moreover, the acquisition of such a standing imposes a *prima facie* obligation for me to be back for dinner. It also alters the “moral relationship” between my wife and I, such that were I not to be back for dinner, I would be blameworthy in a way I would not be had I not made that promise.<sup>368</sup> This acquisition of a normative standing is equally true for other types of speech-acts. If I were to tell my boss that “I am not feeling well” and thereby acquire the standing of having asserted to my boss that I am not feeling well, my boss would be *prima facie* obligated to take me at my word. Moreover, I would have also acquired the *prima facie* duty and responsibility for it being the case that I am not feeling well. For Wolterstorff, it is the linguistic institutions or systems of arrangements in effect within a community that allow for seemingly innocuous locutionary acts to count as illocutionary acts that carry normative weight in the public domain.

The mutual duties and responsibilities between speakers and addressees are not absolute but *prima facie*. A speech-act could be “undercut” for a person if that person has good reasons for “thinking that it is malformed in such a way that the *prima facie* rights and responsibilities which accrue to speakers and hearers upon its performance do not, in this case, actually accrue to them”.<sup>369</sup> For instance, if a stranger were to command me to reveal to him my personal financial information and I have good reasons to believe that he is not in a position to issue such a command, I would then be relieved of the *prima facie* obligation to obey. A speech-act could be malformed in a variety of ways and in each of these ways it may

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., pp.84, 94.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p.88.

undercut the speech-act as to negate the mutual duties and obligations between speaker and addressee.<sup>370</sup>

One important consequence of Wolterstorff's 'normative theory of discourse' is that speaking is not merely the transmission of information from speaker to addressee or the expression of one's inner state. Rather, it is "through and through, a normative engagement".<sup>371</sup> Fundamentally, to speak is to "take up a normative stance in the public domain" and these kinds of normative stances are what illocutionary acts are essentially about.<sup>372</sup> Therefore, to perform an illocutionary act of requesting addressed to someone is not to express one's mind, thoughts or intentions but to take up a normative stance in the public domain, and in virtue of taking up this stance, the moral relationship between speaker and addressee is altered (assuming that the illocutionary act performed is understood by the addressee and is not undercut). If this is right, then it follows that the task of understanding what is being said must also be centred around the recovery of this public normative stance. Hence, Wolterstorff argues that hermeneutics (in the sense of discovering what is being said) is first and foremost the discernment of the public illocutionary act performed by the author rather than an attempt to uncover the author's inner psychological state.<sup>373</sup>

Wolterstorff is not the only recent analytic philosopher of language who has been arguing for a "normative theory of discourse". Most prominently, William Alston has also independently contended for the normativity of illocutionary acts in much greater depth and sophistication than Wolterstorff.<sup>374</sup> Alston's work is significant because his account of

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<sup>370</sup> For Wolterstorff's discussion on the ways speech-acts can be malformed, see *ibid.*, p.87.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.93, 183-184.

<sup>374</sup> Another influential contemporary theorist is Robert Brandom who, in his important 1994 work, observes that there is a normative dimension to the social-linguistic practice. Brandom accounts for this normative aspect by arguing that the performance of certain speech-acts implicitly commits one to various things within the practice. Brandom's notion of "discursive commitment" is therefore very similar to Alston's concept of "taking responsibility". However, Brandom does not work within the paradigm of speech-act theory

speech-acts explicitly uncovers the way in which illocutionary acts are able to create new normative states for their addressees, whereas this aspect remains largely implicit and underdeveloped in Wolterstorff's account. Since the 1960s, Alston has been arguing that the notion of "taking responsibility" (or R'ing for abbreviation) is central to understanding the nature of illocutionary acts.<sup>375</sup> According to him, to perform an illocutionary act is for speaker U to utter sentence S and in uttering S take responsibility for ensuring that some conditions C are met.<sup>376</sup> This taking of responsibility for C is something that U does, an active bringing about of a normative state of affairs rather than a passive recognition of an antecedent one. It is an actualisation of a normative state of affairs because in taking responsibility for C, U is also laying herself open to "just censure" if C is not the case, since U in uttering S recognizes that "there is just ground for complaint" if C is not satisfied.<sup>377</sup>

Alston held that the notion of 'taking responsibility' can be further analysed in terms of what he calls 'illocutionary rules' or 'I-rules' for short. On his view, an I-rule is a rule that lays down the "necessary and sufficient conditions for sentence utterance, where the social rationale of the rule is the facilitation of communication".<sup>378</sup> On this analysis, speaker U takes responsibility for conditions C being satisfied by subjecting her utterance, S, to an I-rule that "implies that it is permissible for U to utter S" only if C is the case.<sup>379</sup> Hence, in virtue of U knowingly subjecting S to an I-rule, U has thereby taken responsibility for C and, in doing so, institutes a normative state of affairs where U is liable to censure if C is not the case. For Alston, in a similar vein to Wolterstorff, "an utterance is most basically made into an illocutionary act of a certain type by virtue of a normative stance on the part of the speaker"

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and hence shares less commonality with Wolterstorff and is therefore not as suitable a conversational partner for our purposes here. Brandom (1994), p.142.

<sup>375</sup> See e.g., Alston (1964); Alston (1964a).

<sup>376</sup> Alston (2000), p.55.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., pp.55-56.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., p.272.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., p.60.

and this normative stance is achieved by the speaker taking responsibility for various state of affairs or conditions through subjecting her utterance to an I-rule.<sup>380</sup> Thus, on Alston's account, the act of "taking responsibility" is at the heart of illocutionary acts and it is this very act that alters the speaker's normative status and opens oneself up to just censure in a way that would not otherwise be. This notion of "taking responsibility" also accounts for the difference among the various types of illocutionary acts. According to Alston, different categories of illocutionary acts are "distinguished by a distinctive pattern of conditions" C that U takes responsibility for.<sup>381</sup> For example, Bob performs a non-malformed promise to Jane to clean up the house in uttering S, "I promise to clean up the house", if and only if in uttering S, Bob took responsibility for the following conditions being met: (1) it is possible to clean up the house, (2) Jane would prefer Bob cleaning up the house than not, and (3) Bob intends to clean up the house. This distinctive pattern of conditions (of which (1)-(3) is an example) that the speaker takes responsibility for, by subjecting the utterance S to an I-rule, distinguishes the illocutionary act of promising from other categories of speech-acts.

Similar to Wolterstorff, Alston also maintains that the performance of an illocutionary act sometimes not only alters the normative status of the speaker but also the addressee's.<sup>382</sup> For instance, my wife, in making a request for me to get the mail on my way back, has also thereby altered my normative status such that were I to ignore or decline the request without a suitable reason, I would be subjected to just censure. Moreover, this is a liability or obligation that I would not have acquired had my wife not made such a request. Nevertheless, because she did, my normative status has been altered regardless if I like it or not. This obligation is, of course, subject to its appropriateness. The request may be inappropriate or defective in ways that would not lay any obligations on me. Alternatively, if I have an adequate reason to

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., p.71.

<sup>381</sup> Alston also notes that the only exception to this are assertions, where "assertions are distinguished by a certain constraint on the sentence uttered." Ibid., p.134.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p.100.

decline the request, that would also relieve me of the obligation. According to Alston, the reason why certain illocutionary acts such as acts of requesting are able to oblige us and alter our normative status is due to the complex relations that constitutes our social intercourse. He argues in the following way:

The institution of requesting presupposes a background of social rules, expectations and discriminations. First, there are largely implicit, context-dependent, and imprecise principles for determining the appropriateness of requests. These have to do with such factors as the social relation of requester and requestee, the content of the request, the situation of each party, and so on... In addition there is a complex set of largely implicit principles concerning the conditions under which a request-generated obligation can be overridden. When I make a request I tap into this social network by way of R'ing that I engender such a weak obligation on the part of the addressee.<sup>383</sup>

For Alston, illocutionary acts alter the normative status of its addressee by way of the speaker taking responsibility for certain conditions, some of which “tap” into this complex social and moral network to lay a claim on the addressee.

Alston’s account of illocutionary acts bears more than a passing resemblance to Wolterstorff’s proposal. In fact, most of the features in Wolterstorff’s account are found within Alston’s but in a more developed and sophisticated manner. The common thread that runs through both is that illocutionary acts are through and through normative activities. Acts of promising, requesting, commanding or any other illocutionary acts presuppose and draw upon our complex social and moral network for their performance by way of adopting a normative stance within this network. In doing so, they also institute a normative state of affairs that alters the normative status of speaker and addressee. Because of this, for Alston, as well as Wolterstorff, “an utterance is most basically made into an illocutionary act of a certain type by virtue of a normative stance on the part of the speaker”.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., p.101.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., p.71.



#### 4.6.2 Discourse and the Normative Aspect of Transformation

The contributions of Wolterstorff and Alston on the nature of illocutionary acts bring to the forefront the normative nature of discourse and highlight the crucial difference between taking Scripture as an instrument of divine address and other approaches to Scripture which neglect or deny the discursive aspect of Scripture. The performance of an illocutionary act is not merely a transmission of information between speaker and addressee nor is it reducible to a sign that stands for various ideas in the mind, as Edwards' account of language usage seems to suggest. Rather, it institutes a normative relationship (which is constituted by mutual *prima facie* duties and responsibilities) between speaker and addressee. If this is true of human speakers, there is no reason to think why this would not be true of the divine speaker as well.<sup>385</sup> God in speaking to us has not only revealed certain divine truths, insights or his person to us, but more importantly, he has entered into a normative relationship with us as speaker and addressee. This is the crucial difference between reading Scripture as merely divinely inspired historical writings and as divine address. If Scripture is nothing but a loose collection of sacred historical writings or even a collection of significant and accurate propositions about divine reality revealed by God, it is still compatible with the fact that God has not spoken.<sup>386</sup> Speaking or the performance of an illocutionary act brings about a normative state of affairs between speaker and addressee in a way that acts of revealing do not, and it is this normative aspect of illocutionary acts that mere history or facts do not give us.<sup>387</sup>

To appreciate the significance of speech-act theory for our understanding of Scripture, it might be helpful to compare it with other dominant views of Scripture. Richard Topping, in

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<sup>385</sup> Some might think that God cannot have any form of duties or obligations as speaker so that even if he were to make an explicit promise to someone, he has no obligation to fulfil it. Wolterstorff argues against this in Chapter 6 of *Divine Discourse*.

<sup>386</sup> See also Wolterstorff (1995), p. Chapter 2.

<sup>387</sup> Hence, Wolterstorff contends that the notion of divine speaking is not equivalent to divine revelation or communication. *Ibid.*, pp.31-36.

a recent study of the influential theological hermeneutics of James Barr, Paul Ricoeur and Hans Frei, argues that all three approaches fail “to depict the hermeneutic situation of the church and the nature of the Bible in terms of their common implication within God’s communicative and salvific action”.<sup>388</sup> His diagnosis of their fundamental error is an unhealthy reliance on general categories of interpretation at the expense of attention to the revelatory action of God. Hence, Barr, in advocating a historical-critical approach to interpretation, insists on bracketing out pre-conceived theological and dogmatic notions (such as revelation and holy Scripture) in order to make room for a critical interpretation for the church. Revelation, for Barr, is strongly immanent in nature with divine action rendered as immanent within the human actions of inscripturation and formation of the Bible. On the other hand, Ricoeur suggests that revelation is best thought of as a projecting or proposing of possible worlds by the biblical text through the interplay of the various modes of discourse we find in Scripture.<sup>389</sup> Moreover, he bases his hermeneutical approach on a “heavily theorized accounts of texts and their interpreting subjects and communities”<sup>390</sup> in a way that Topping thinks obscures and displaces the activity of God in Scriptural hermeneutics. As for Hans Frei, Topping’s critique of Frei’s hermeneutic proposal is targeted at his emphasis on the literary genre and communal reading practice of the church at the expense of the agency of God in illuminating Scripture and generating faith within the reader. Topping notes that Frei “consistently focuses on creaturely action in construing the interpretative field” that divine agency is “often hidden from view or simply remain tacit in his hermeneutic”.<sup>391</sup> However, Topping is also the most sympathetic towards Frei’s program since he thinks that Frei’s appropriation of Barth’s theological hermeneutics does put his proposal on better grounds compared to Barr’s and Ricoeur’s account. Hence, in one way or another, all three

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<sup>388</sup> Topping (2007), p.1.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., pp.32-33.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., p.55.

approaches fail to appropriately appeal to the divine agency of God in their understanding of Scripture and replace it with inappropriate immanent categories, resulting in a hermeneutic that marginalises the divine agent.

Topping's evaluation of the influential hermeneutic programs in contemporary theology echoes John Webster's own criticism that the theological dimension of Scripture has often been overshadowed by other non-theological considerations.<sup>392</sup> Although I agree with much of Topping's evaluation, I would add the observation that none of the approaches actually bring us into a normative discursive engagement with God through Scripture. Neither the reconstruction of the "world behind the text" by Barr, the focus on the "world in front of the text" by Ricoeur, nor the emphasis on the "world within the text" by Frei actually tell us how God speaks to us and thereby normatively engages us in Scripture. Even when we appeal to explicit theological notions, as Topping suggests, in our understanding of Scripture – notions such as divine inspiration, sanctification, revelation or divine illumination – it does not change the situation. Acts of revealing, inspiring, sanctifying and illuminating are fundamentally distinct from the act of discourse in that the former four do not entail taking up a normative stance in the way illocutionary acts require. God could reveal the most glorious truth and generate the most sincere faith without ever performing a single illocutionary act, but unless he performs an illocutionary act we are not drawn into that normative discursive relationship with him. For this reason, Wolterstorff was able to make the following rather bold claim: "speech-act theory as applied to double-agency discourse enables us to understand how it can be that God speaks, or discourses – literally so! – by way of Scripture. I know of no other approach that has the same potential".<sup>393</sup> This particular point made by Wolterstorff, in my opinion, is the true value and significance of speech-act theory for

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<sup>392</sup> Webster's criticism can be found in a number of his works including the following: Webster (2001), pp.9-11, 49-58, 101-107; Webster (2003), pp.43-44.

<sup>393</sup> Wolterstorff (2001), p.84.

theology. Speech-act theory has been appropriated in various ways in theology and biblical studies with varying degrees of success.<sup>394</sup> However, its true potential is in explaining how God can discourse with us via Scripture and draw us into a certain normative relationship with him through the discourse. This is a potential that not even explicit dogmatic notions like ‘revelation’, ‘inspiration’, ‘illumination’ and ‘sanctification’ can deliver.<sup>395</sup>

An important parallel point to the normativity of divine discourse is that as readers of Scripture, our normative status is altered simply by the act of reading Scripture. As Alston and Wolterstorff have argued, the performance of an illocutionary act lays certain obligations and responsibilities on the speaker and addressee. The addressee, simply in understanding the illocutionary act, has thereby acquired the *prima facie* duties and responsibilities as one addressed by God. This feature of illocutionary acts emphasises the point that the practice of reading Scripture is never an innocuous act. Whenever we read Scripture and understand the divine illocutionary act addressed to us, our normative status would be altered in such a way that we are now open to normative blame which we otherwise would not. This is one important sense in which Scripture is transformative: it transforms and alters our normative status as one addressed by God in Scripture. This sense of transformation has also been picked up in the work of Anthony Thiselton. Thiselton refers to Scripture as a “transforming text” in the sense that there are certain speech-acts within Scripture that “leave neither the speaker nor the hearer uninvolved and unchanged”.<sup>396</sup> Instead, “they bring about a transformation in the extra-linguistic relationship between the speaker and the audience and

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<sup>394</sup> Richard Briggs has provided a helpful discussion of the many ways speech-act theory has been appropriated in philosophy, theology and biblical studies, some being more problematic than others. Briggs (2001), pp.3-27.

<sup>395</sup> This precise point is the fundamental weakness of Webster’s dogmatic proposal. Webster proposes using the three primary theological concepts of “revelation”, “sanctification” and “inspiration” for formulating the doctrine of Holy Scripture. However, none of these explicitly theological concepts actually explain what it means for God to speak via Scripture. Webster (2003), pp.5-41.

<sup>396</sup> Thiselton (1992), p.300.

invite the reader to participate in that extra-linguistic transformation and relationship”.<sup>397</sup> For Thiselton, the paradigm examples of such speech-acts are the promises of God that we find in Scripture. The illocutionary act of promising “constitutes an act which shapes a state of affairs”.<sup>398</sup> Hence, these divine promises transform and shape the world extra-linguistically with the language used. For this reason, Thiselton maintains that the Scriptural texts “are not simply flat descriptions of abstract doctrinal truths or heavenly transactions”.<sup>399</sup> On the contrary, they bring about a new state of affairs that transforms and involves the speaker and hearer in ways that would not be had the speech-act not been performed.

#### 4.7 The Soteriological Function of the Divine Address

Our discussion up to this point has brought us to the conclusion that reading Scripture as divine address is a normatively transformative experience – that is, our normative status is altered in virtue of understanding the divine illocutionary acts addressed to us in Scripture. However, we have yet to attend to the soteriological value of entering into that normative relationship which the divine address instantiates. Hence, in this section, we want to consider what function the normative divine address plays within the divine economy of soteriological grace.

From the perspective of the foregoing discussion, there are at least three important transformative or soteriological functions that could be attributed to the divine normative address. First, it allows the readers of Scripture to enter into a soteriological relationship with the God who addresses them in Scripture. The normative status that Scriptural readers acquire in the divine address makes certain responses socially and normatively possible and

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., p.298.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., p.285.

appropriate which otherwise would not be. For instance, suppose that God has promised us, his addressees, through the medium of Scripture that we will be a part of his coming Kingdom and in virtue of performing this illocutionary act has altered the normative status of both speaker and addressee. If so, then as readers addressed by God, the appropriate response to this divine promise, given our normative standing and the various *prima facie* privileges and responsibilities attached to this standing, would then be to hold God to his promise and await in trusting expectancy for its fulfilment. However, such a response would be inappropriate if the promise was never addressed to us in the first place. This is because the normative status that an appropriate illocutionary act brings about also gives rise to certain exclusive normative rights for her addressee based on the normative relationship that stands between speaker and addressee. To take another example: given that the bridegroom has solemnly promised to be faithful to his bride, the bride now has not only the *prima facie* duty to trust in the groom's promise but she has also acquired the exclusive normative right to demand that she be the recipient of the bridegroom's promise and that he fulfils his promise or be subjected to just censure. However, had the bride exercised the same demand when no such promise has been made to her, it is the bride that would be subjected to just censure.<sup>400</sup> This is because, in the latter case, the bride is attempting to relate to the groom in a certain normative fashion when she has not acquired the appropriate normative status to do so. This example points to the more significant point that similar to marital relations, our soteriological relationship with God is also a normative relationship that entails certain *prima facie* rights, obligations and responsibilities. Moreover, this normative relationship is often instantiated through the performance of various divine illocutionary acts such as divine promises and covenants. Therefore, if we were to read Scripture without attention to the divine address, we could fail to relate to God in the normative fashion that our soteriological

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<sup>400</sup> The bridegroom could still be justly censured on other grounds, such as being heartless or insensitive, but not on the grounds of not fulfilling his promise.

relationship with him requires. The Scriptural text, as Thiselton noted, is not merely a “flat description” of doctrinal truths but filled with illocutionary acts (such as acts of inviting, commanding, summoning and promising) that normatively engage the reader.<sup>401</sup> If readers of Scripture do not attend to the normative dimension of the divine address and do not believe and perceive themselves as the addressee of the divine illocutionary acts performed by means of Scripture, they do not enter into the normative relationship with God that these illocutionary acts instantiate. Furthermore, because this normative relationship partially constitutes one’s soteriological relationship with God, a failure to enter into it is also often a failure to relate to him soteriologically. For this reason, the soteriological understanding of Scripture is always an act of faith since it requires the reader to understand and trust that she is personally addressed by God in the reading of Scripture.

The second soteriological function of the normative divine address is that it allows us to encounter the personal agency of God in the reading of Scripture. John Webster has remarked that “to read the biblical writings is not to be invited to reflect, but to be summoned by evangelical address”.<sup>402</sup> By this Webster meant to highlight the manner in which we come to encounter the good news of salvation in the reading of Scripture; mainly, we are individually and corporately summoned before the presence of God to be personally addressed by him with the gospel of Jesus Christ. By attending to Scripture in such a manner, we come to directly encounter the agency of God in a way that mere reflection upon the divine truths and wisdom of the text does not. In this encounter, we are confronted with the various illocutionary acts of God – his commands, requests, encouragements, warnings – addressed to us. These illocutionary acts are nothing less than the actions of God, the exercise of divine agency upon our lives in the encounter with him through the reading of Scripture. This exercise of divine agency is also creative in nature in that it brings about a new

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<sup>401</sup> Thiselton (1992), p.285.

<sup>402</sup> Webster (2003), p.78.

normative state of affairs by which we, the readers, acquire a new normative status through an act of divine initiative. Hence, the reading of Scripture for the normative divine address is always an encounter with the personal agency of God that opens the reader to the illocutionary actions of God. It was for this reason that Wolterstorff insists that interpretation “consists of engaging a person rather than just doing something to an artefact”.<sup>403</sup> In a similar vein, Webster also contends that Scripture cannot be considered the “church’s book, something internal to the community’s discursive practices”. For Webster, to read Scripture for the divine address is to be confronted by an “alien” and “intrusive” voice or agency.<sup>404</sup> The reading of Scripture is therefore ultimately the encounter of readers with the agency and person of God.<sup>405</sup> Moreover, it is also in an important sense an encounter with his divine authority over us. Scripture is authoritative over the church not only in the epistemic sense of being the standard of truth and practice but also in the practical sense of functioning as a medium for the authoritative divine voice. God’s illocutionary acts are authoritative because, to use Alston’s characterisation, it “taps” into that complex divine-human social relational network (by R’ing for C in the public domain) to lay upon his addressees various obligations and rights.<sup>406</sup> Hence, we are obligated to obey God’s commands in Scripture because the command draws upon the kind of authoritative relationship God has over his creatures to lay an obligation on us through the illocutionary act of commanding. This laid obligation is thus

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<sup>403</sup> Wolterstorff (2006a), p.49. It was also observed by Merold Westphal that by making the claim that God speaks central, Wolterstorff is also arguing that God is personal, because “to speak literally of divine discourse is indeed to presuppose a personal God.” Westphal (1997), p.527.

<sup>404</sup> Webster (2005), p.110.

<sup>405</sup> This point also complements Van Der Kooi’s observation regarding the tendency in contemporary theology to characterise “knowledge in faith” as “knowledge which arises from encounter” as seen in the work of Barth, Berkhof, Brunner and Jungel. Van Der Kooi (2005), p.9.

<sup>406</sup> Alston (2000), p.101.



in a sense also a manifestation of divine authority that one encounters in attending to the normative divine address in Scripture.<sup>407</sup>

The third soteriological function of the divine address is that it facilitates and sustains our personal relationship with God. As noted earlier by Edwards, our social union and personal friendship with God is profoundly dependent on an ongoing mutual conversation between God and man. Interpersonal relationships thrive on appropriate interpersonal discourse and, for Edwards, this is equally true for our personal relationship with God.<sup>408</sup> Scripture plays an important role in this interpersonal union because it is the medium of God's personal address to us, through which we experience him comforting, encouraging, promising, commanding and leading us in the various particular situations of our life. These normative discursive acts of God towards us sustain our personal relationship with him and enable us to experience the manner in which he is personally involved in our lives. Therefore, the normative dimension of Scripture allows us to experience God as deeply personal and, though it, facilitate our love and appreciation for him as a personal discursive being.

#### 4.8 Spiritual Perception and the Normative Weight of Scripture

To conclude our discussion in this chapter I want to spend some time tying the threads together from the past chapters and consider the implications of our foregoing discussion for the task of contemporising spiritual perception. In the previous chapter, we examined the first major component of Edwards' theory of spiritual perception which is the infusion of grace. In this chapter, we focused on the second major component of his theory – Scripture as the word of God. During the course of our discussion, we highlighted the significance of Scripture's

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<sup>407</sup> Cf. Webster makes the same point but in a different way by affirming that "Holy Scripture is the *viva vox Dei*, and that this living voice demands an attitude of ready submission and active compliance." Webster (2003), p.80.

<sup>408</sup> WJE 23:350-351.

discursive dimension which Edwards did eventually come to recognize late in his life but did not have the chance to retrospectively integrate it into his theory. As we have seen, his account of spiritual perception and understanding take Scripture to have “no influence to produce grace” and effectively divest it of any divine transforming power.<sup>409</sup> For him, Scripture is simply a series of signs that stand for the life-changing sensations and ideas that are communicated only in the divine love that is infused within the hearts of believers. On this Edwardsean way of thinking, the role of Scripture in spiritual perception and understanding is limited to merely providing the reader with the subject matter and natural ideas of the things of religion.

In light of our discussion in this chapter, Edwards’ position is simply unsatisfying for two main reasons. First, Scripture as the word of God is not merely a series of signs but is also the vehicle for normative divine speech-action. Therefore, Scriptural reading does not merely provide the mind with the notions and natural ideas of the things of religion. More importantly, the reading of Scripture is itself an encounter with the personal divine agency of God. Edwards’ doctrine of spiritual understanding tends to be narrowly focused on the affective effects of the infused disposition in the Scriptural reading experience and ignores the normative dimension of reading Scripture. On his account, it makes no difference whether one’s religious ideas are acquired through natural revelation or the discourse of God. The only thing that is of significance is that the ideas are accurate and appear glorious to the subject, thus motivating one to appropriate response. However, what this chapter has shown is that there is a crucial difference between the two. Divine discourse via Scripture entails a normative engagement that is lacking in mere natural revelation and this normative dimension is just as important to spiritual perception and understanding as the infusion of the Spirit. The spiritual understanding of Scripture cannot be conceived as simply having

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<sup>409</sup> WJE 18:84.

accurate and supernaturally glorious ideas about God. Significantly, spiritual understanding and perception must also involve a discernment of the divine address of God in Scripture. As argued earlier, a failure to discern the divine address in Scripture is also a failure to relate to God in the normative fashion that our soteriological relationship with him requires. In addition, it is also a failure to encounter his divine agency and authority in the Scriptural reading experience. This crucial normative dimension of Scriptural understanding, however, is altogether missing in Edwards' account of spiritual understanding and perception. Hence, his account remains lacking in this important aspect.

The second unsatisfactory aspect of Edwards' account pertains to his failure to give due recognition to the transformative potency of Scripture. On his view, the divine transforming power and reality is located in the infused spiritual disposition and not in Scripture. Scriptural reading in itself is devoid of any divine transforming potency and has to rely on the infusion of the Spirit for the transformative power of God. Therefore, Scripture is not intrinsic to the actual transforming reality and neither does it play any integral role (despite its practical necessity) in bringing about the spiritual transformation of believers. The reading of Scripture merely allows for the appropriate opportunity for God's arbitrary work of transformation but is not constitutive of or integral to the actual divine transformative reality and power. The discussion in this chapter, however, has shown that Scripture as the medium of divine speech-act does in fact play a crucial transformative role that is intrinsically related to the broader gracious transforming work of God. The divine appropriation of a collection of writings as one single and unified work to serve as the medium of divine address allows her addressees to enter into a normative relationship with God. Such an engagement alters and transforms the normative status of the hearers of the divine address and brings the addressee into a certain normative relationship with God, within which the individual can begin his or her soteriological relationship with him. Therefore,

contra Edwards, Scripture does not merely provide an opportunity for the divine work of grace. Rather, the very act of God personally addressing us in Scripture is itself a gracious transformative work of altering our normative status and granting us the required normative standing to appropriately respond to his word.<sup>410</sup> Hence, Scripture, even apart from the infusion of the Spirit, has its own distinctive transformative potency that is not given due recognition in Edwards' account of spiritual perception and understanding.

In addition to the alteration of one's normative status, the normative transformation and engagement that Scriptural reading brings about also plays an important role in perceiving the goodness of God and the generation of spiritual delight. This normative aspect of spiritual perception is of great significance to the psychology of grace and will be attended to in greater detail in the next two chapters. Therefore, Scripture cannot be thought of as merely extrinsic and contingent to the work of grace as suggested by Edwards. Instead, it is intimately and intrinsically related to the transforming grace of God: first, in transforming and altering our normative status and, secondly, in the generation of one's spiritual perception of divine goodness and spiritual delight as we shall see in the subsequent chapters.

In conclusion, the word of God does have an immense "metaphysical weight", to use Jenson's phrase, that is not given due recognition in Edwards' original account. This "metaphysical weight" is nothing less than the normative weight of divine speech-acts in the public domain. In our contemporisation of spiritual perception we want to affirm the normative dimension of Scripture's transforming power and emphasise its ability as the medium of divine discourse to transform and alter our normative status. Nevertheless, the normative address of God via Scripture is but one aspect of its transforming power.

Significantly, Scripture also plays an important role in the transformation of our motivational

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<sup>410</sup> Angus Paddison makes a similar point by maintaining that "God speaks his Word... from eternity into humanity, so rendering possible and potential salvific dialogue between the scriptural reader and God." Paddison (2006), p.438.

and perceptual structures so that we can respond rightly to the demands of the normative relationship that is instituted through the divine speech-act. This latter aspect of transformation shall be the focus of the next two chapters.

## **Chapter Five: Spiritual Perception and the Transformative Understanding of Scripture**

### 5.1 Introduction

The emphasis on the transformative function of Scripture in its normative discursive dimension goes some way towards the recovery of Scripture's "metaphysical weight" and transformative power in the work of grace that was lacking in Edwards' original account of spiritual perception. But is it enough? Is the alteration of one's normative status the only kind of "weight" and transformative potency that should be ascribed to Scripture? What role, if any, does Scripture play in the psychological dimension of transforming grace, especially as it pertains to spiritual understanding and perception? In this chapter, we want to continue with the "recovery of the Word" in spiritual perception by considering the function of Scripture in generating emotional perceptions and psychological transformation within her readers.

As mentioned in the last chapter, Edwards adopts a Lockean referential view of language and conceives of Scripture as mere notional signs that cannot communicate the actual signified ideas in the mind of its divine author. Instead, it is the Spirit that provides believers with the actual ideas through the spiritual sense that infused grace affords. On this view, the content of Scripture is then nothing but a series of transformatively impotent notional signs that stands for something other than itself. Consequently, Edwards is able to assert that Scripture is not the proper cause of grace and has "no influence to work grace".<sup>411</sup> For him, Scripture as signs largely plays only an extrinsic and non-integral role in the

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<sup>411</sup> WJE 18:85.

formation of gracious affections. It merely provides the appropriate subject matter of the experience but contributes little to the actual experiencing of the glorious divine reality.<sup>412</sup>

The discussion in the last chapter, however, has shown that Scripture cannot plausibly be thought of as mere signs, not least because it is also the medium of divine action and therefore does not merely refer to ideas in the mind but also serves as a vehicle for normative action in the public domain. In addition, there is another significant reason why this Edwardsean conception of Scripture should be rejected. Scripture, in an important sense, also functions like a literary artefact or work of art, and just as literary works cannot be thought of simply as signs, neither can Scripture.<sup>413</sup> For the current chapter we want to reflect on this latter aspect of Scripture and consider the nature of its content and what it means to understand Scripture in a way that brings about moral and spiritual change.

Roberts' recent work on the nature of understanding and its relationship with the emotions once again provides some very relevant potential correctives for Edwards' conception of Scripture's role in the formation of gracious affections. His work hence serves as a helpful conversational partner for the "recovery of the Word" in our contemporisation of spiritual perception and allows for the development of a more robust understanding of Scripture and its content. With this in mind, the overall approach for this chapter is to begin with a discussion on Roberts' work on the nature of understanding, followed by an application of that notion to the understanding of Scripture and works of literature in general. Finally, we will draw together our discussion to consider what it is to have a transformative understanding of Scripture. Following this outline, we shall begin by reflecting on the nature of understanding and, specifically, the understanding of a textual work.

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<sup>412</sup> "Divine and Supernatural Light," in WJE 17:416.

<sup>413</sup> Therefore, Robert Alter, in his seminal work, has highlighted the literary dimension of Scripture and argued for the need to develop a literary appreciation and reading of the Bible. There is a certain artistic quality and literary coherence to the Bible as literary work that renders it irreducible to mere signs. Alter (1981), p.22. See also Alter (1992), pp.47-84.

## 5.2 The Nature of Understanding

In their recent work on virtue epistemology and epistemic psychology, Robert Roberts and Jay Wood advance a vision of epistemology whereby the discipline of contemporary analytic epistemology ventures beyond its myopic preoccupation with propositional knowledge and the narrow conception of knowledge as warranted or justified true beliefs. In its place, they propose an approach to epistemology that understands its primary task as “the study of knowledge and the conditions of its acquisition, transmission, and application”.<sup>414</sup> Along with this reorientation of the discipline, they also argue for a broader and richer notion of knowledge that goes deeper than the conception prevalent in contemporary analytic philosophy. In particular, they are interested in highlighting the “role of character traits in facilitating the acquisition, transmission, and application of knowledge”.<sup>415</sup> An important aspect of their proposal is that analytic epistemologists should broaden the range of epistemic goods beyond that of warranted beliefs. For Roberts and Wood, although warranted belief is a proper epistemic good to be valued, there are also other distinct intellectual goods that are often just as worth having. Two such important intellectual or epistemic goods are acquaintance and understanding.<sup>416</sup>

Acquaintance, in the epistemic sense, is a kind of “experiencing for oneself” as when we experience the smell of fresh bread or the beauty of a sunrise for ourselves.<sup>417</sup> The epistemic value of such acquaintance “is not exhausted in their forming grounds for beliefs”.<sup>418</sup> For instance, one’s epistemic interest in being acquainted with the taste of honey may simply be to experience for oneself its taste. In such a case, the “epistemic point of the

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<sup>414</sup> Roberts and Wood (2009), p.1.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>416</sup> A growing number of contemporary epistemologists, such as Jonathan Kvanvig, Duncan Pritchard and Linda Zagzebski, have recently argued along similar lines as Roberts and Wood. They contend for a broadening of epistemic goods beyond knowledge and sees understanding as even more valuable than knowledge. For a review of this movement in contemporary epistemology, see Grimm (2012).

<sup>417</sup> Roberts and Wood (2009), p.51.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.



acquaintance may be just the cognitive contact with reality” rather than epistemic warrant or justification for any sort of beliefs.<sup>419</sup> The epistemic agent might simply not be interested in the formation of warranted beliefs regarding the taste of honey even if such beliefs usually follow from acquaintance of this sort. Moreover, according to Roberts and Wood, acquaintance and belief could in principle be kept apart in many instances. Hence, when one comes to be visually acquainted with a painting, one does not necessarily form a belief as a result. Moreover, the kind of knowledge that is involved in such acquaintance does not necessarily involve beliefs of any sort.<sup>420</sup> It may perhaps occasionally involve trivia beliefs of the kind ‘*I am now visually experiencing the artwork*’; however, such beliefs seem to be irrelevant to the sort of knowledge that is central to cases of epistemic acquaintance.

In addition to acquaintance, there is also the epistemic good of understanding which Roberts and Wood take to be fundamentally “an ability to grasp or draw connections” among things.<sup>421</sup> For instance, understanding a literary work such as *The Brothers Karamazov* involves grasping a myriad of complex relationships and connections which includes: the grammatical and syntactical relationships between words, the connections between various parts of the novel with the overall literary theme, the overall coherence of the novel and so forth. Moreover, due to the complexity of the object of understanding, understanding often admits of degrees.<sup>422</sup> Hence, one could begin with a shallow understanding of *The Brothers Karamazov* and learn to understand it better. This form of learning may not necessarily involve the learning of new propositions but it would almost always involve a perceiving,

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., p.43.

grasping, drawing or following of new connections and relationships with various elements of the novel.<sup>423</sup>

Understanding as an ability to grasp or make connections is also intimately related to its capacity to “recognize things” and “knowing how to do things”.<sup>424</sup> The ability to recognize, say an utterance as an English phrase, is the ability to grasp or make the connection that the utterance fits the syntactic and phonetic structure of a well formed English phrase.

Furthermore, understanding could also manifest as an ability to do things, such as the mechanical understanding a veteran car mechanic may have. The veteran mechanic grasps how a car works and the manner in which the various parts come together to form a coherent and functioning whole. He also perceives and recognizes various important spatial and mechanical relational patterns and as a result is able to make certain connections regarding what to do next in order for the various parts of the car to work together as a whole. It is the making and grasping of these connections and relations that differentiates the novice from the expert. The understanding possessed by the veteran mechanic grants him the ability to make an accurate mechanical diagnosis and gives him a know-how that the novice lacks. Hence, understanding often manifests itself as an ability: an ability to recognize things, to do certain things, to paraphrase, to follow through connections or to perceive relations.<sup>425</sup>

The above example of mechanical understanding also highlights the point that understanding may be non-propositional. The mechanic could very well be unable to express all of his understanding in propositional form, though it is likely that he might be able to do so for some of it.<sup>426</sup> Hence, Roberts and Wood argue that “understanding differs from

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<sup>423</sup> Roberts, in another paper, presents the notion of understanding as “primarily a matter of grasping, creating and/or being able to follow out, connections in a series or system or array”. Roberts (2010a), pp.115-116.

<sup>424</sup> Roberts and Wood (2009), p.47.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Michael Polanyi famously makes the same point by differentiating between “tacit” and “explicit” knowledge with the former being the sort of knowledge that cannot be easily propositionalised. Polanyi (1966).

propositional knowledge, not in being necessarily non-propositional, but in not being necessarily propositional”.<sup>427</sup> This is one way in which understanding differs from propositional knowledge. However, there is another way in which it differs. Propositional knowledge is necessarily true, while understanding need not be. One could understand Freud’s theory of the unconscious mind without having it to be true. It is thus possible to have an in-depth understanding of something that is false.

For Roberts and Wood, understanding is an important and pervasive epistemic good. It features in almost every instance of knowledge, from propositional knowledge to perceptual recognition to apprehending complex conceptual truths.<sup>428</sup> Starting with propositional knowledge, they argue that such knowledge is inextricably linked to understanding in two ways. First, beliefs often gain their epistemic justification through inference, and inference is a case of understanding in that it is the act of grasping and perceiving the logical or epistemic relations and connections between premises and conclusion.<sup>429</sup> Hence, understanding is often a precondition for believing a proposition and is required for the proper epistemic grounding of the belief. Second, understanding is also required even for cases of basic belief formation (beliefs that are not inferred from other beliefs), because even then, understanding is involved to make possible the “perceptions that give rise to propositional knowledge by way of basic belief formation”.<sup>430</sup> According to the authors, basic belief-producing faculties like perceptual vision and touch require understanding for their proper functioning, since to be able to see that ‘the cat is on the mat’ requires “recognizing the situation as having the elements and structure that it has” which in turn “involves grasping connections between things, making sense of an array”.<sup>431</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>427</sup> Roberts and Wood (2009), p.47.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

not only is understanding required for epistemic justification and propositional knowledge, it is also inextricably involved in the proper functioning of our basic belief-producing faculties.

Besides propositional knowledge, knowledge in the form of perceptual acquaintance also typically involves understanding. The authors argue that many of our perceptual acquaintances are conditioned by our understanding.<sup>432</sup> For instance, to be aurally acquainted with a spoken Latin sentence requires more than just hearing the sounds being produced by a Latin speaker; significantly, it further requires an understanding or grasping of the sounds produced in relation to Latin vocabulary, phonetics, syntax and the overall coherence of the sentence. Only the person who understands Latin can, via the patterns of sound produced, perceive what is said in that sequence of auditory sensation. Similarly, it is the trained musician rather than the musically uninitiated that can fully perceive and be acquainted with the sublimity of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Understanding is hence intimately related to almost every instance of knowledge and plays an important role in what we believe propositionally and conditions what we perceive.

### 5.2.1 Understanding-Experiences

The intimate relationship between understanding and perceptual acquaintance as noted above also highlights for us an important category of experience implicit in Roberts and Wood's treatment of understanding which is significant for our purpose. This category is what Elizabeth Fricker terms as "understanding-experience": a kind of epistemic acquaintance or experience-like state that results from one's understanding.<sup>433</sup> As alluded to earlier, what we understand conditions what we perceive. For instance, as argued by Fricker,

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., p.52.

<sup>433</sup> Fricker (2003), p.325.

what differentiates a competent hearer of a language from a non-competent one is a distinctive linguistic representation and perception that cannot be enjoyed by one who does not know the language and culture of the linguistic community.<sup>434</sup> Hence, it is only by grasping various complex socio-linguistic relationships and connections of a spoken language that one can make the necessary connections and draw together a characteristic semantic coherence from the auditory sensation and perceive the semantic content and force of the utterance. This semantic perception is also a kind of epistemic acquaintance or experience-like state in that the listener is simply impressed with the semantic properties of the utterance. The utterance takes on a certain semantic ‘appearance’ to the listening subject not unlike visual perceptions where the seeing subject is appeared to in a certain characteristic manner as a result of her understanding. Moreover, to enjoy such experience-like state of ‘being appeared to’ is itself a kind of epistemic acquaintance where the subject is in or had been in epistemic contact with (experiencing for oneself) the appearance or impression of the object of perception under certain conditions.

Understanding-experiences of the sort described above are not unique to language competency but are equally present in many other sorts of competency that requires understanding. For example, a veteran soldier is able to perceive the dangers of being flanked by the enemy whereas a civilian might not. A trained economist can perceive an impending economic meltdown from a set of financial graphs and statistics but the layman might not. In all these cases, one’s understanding conditions what is being perceived and enables certain experience-like perceptual acquaintances or appearances.<sup>435</sup>

Understanding-experiences also enjoy a kind of experiential unity that is not available to those who lack the relevant competency in understanding. When we come to enjoy an

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Roberts and Wood (2009), p.52.

understanding-experience of a spoken utterance, we typically do not experience the utterance as an accumulation of discrete parts but as a synthesised whole. The sequences of sounds we hear are drawn together in a certain characteristic manner to form a coherent whole which we perceive. Hence, although our language understanding draws upon many distinct concepts and elements, we do not experience them as individual and discrete components.<sup>436</sup> Rather, the various distinct elements are synthesised together in our understanding to form a unified experience. This experiential unity is present in understanding-experiences in general because it is a defining characteristic of such experiences to grasp the diverse elements as a whole rather than as isolated distinct parts; thus, the resultant experience is also the experience of a unified whole.<sup>437</sup>

The category of understanding-experiences has enormous relevance for the concept of emotions in Roberts' thought because emotions can also be conceived as a kind of understanding-experience. In a separate publication, Roberts remarked that the notion of construal (a concept discussed in chapter two of this dissertation) is actually a species of understanding.<sup>438</sup> What we do in acts of construals is a kind of perceiving, making and grasping of the connections and relations among the parts to form a coherent whole.<sup>439</sup> For instance, the construal or seeing of a figure in a gestalt picture requires one to grasp or connect the parts in the picture in a certain characteristic manner, and such a grasping and drawing of connections among the parts is a distinguishing feature of what one does in acts in understanding.

The relationship between understanding and construal also accounts for the similarities we find between the two. For example, understanding and construal both allow

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<sup>436</sup> Fricker (2003), p.325.

<sup>437</sup> The same point is made by Roberts and Wood, although they do not explicitly invoke the category of "understanding-experience". Roberts and Wood (2009), p.48.

<sup>438</sup> Roberts (2010a), p.116. See section 2.4.2 for the discussion on construals.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

for multiple ways of perceiving the same features of a situation or object. Hence, we can understand a literary work from multiple distinct perspectives in a manner similar to which we can come to construe a gestalt picture in different coherent ways. Furthermore, because understanding, for Roberts, is the genus of construal, it is also by extension intimately related to emotions. As we have seen in chapter two, Roberts views emotions as essentially concern-based construals; hence, it is not surprising to find that he thinks understanding plays an important role in one's emotional life. According to him, in an emotion, "the connections among elements in a situation are pulled together in an order characteristic of the emotion-type (fear, anger, hope, contempt, etc.) and the situation is connected to oneself via one's concerns".<sup>440</sup> This drawing and grasping of connections is yet again an instance of understanding. Therefore, our understanding structures our emotions and conditions our emotional perception and acquaintances.

The relationship between construal and understanding also points to another important feature of understanding: its "synthetic complexity".<sup>441</sup> Roberts argues that many of our perceptions are not merely sensory in the strict sense but involve a construal or what he calls a "construction upon the sensory".<sup>442</sup> For instance, in the case of a gestalt drawing, the sensory data and input underdetermines the perception of the figure in the drawing. Hence, the viewing subject brings in his or her own subjective construction upon the sensory data to arrive at a coherent construal and perception of the figure. In a similar manner to construals, there is also a synthetic character and complexity to many instances of understanding in which we perform our subjective construction upon the sensory data to arrive at various perceptions and acquaintances. Hence, the trained musician is able to better perceive the subtle complexities and astonishing achievement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in a way

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Roberts and Wood (2009), p.52.

<sup>442</sup> Roberts (2010a), p.108.

that an untrained person cannot. The musician is able to do that in part because of the kind of complex construction his musical training allows him to perform upon the sensory data which an untrained person cannot. This construction upon the sensory is fundamentally a kind of understanding in which one grasps, makes or follows certain connections among various elements to form a coherent whole. Moreover, because the complex construction is not something that is given in the sensory data, but a subjective construction one performs upon the data, there is a “synthetic complexity” to understanding. This synthetic character, however, does not necessarily mean that understanding is thereby arbitrary or non-objective, as some post-modernists suggest.<sup>443</sup> The synthetic complexity that subjects bring into their understanding may be epistemically warranted or based upon objective features of reality. Synthetic complexity does not imply arbitrariness or unreasonableness.

Roberts and Woods’ work in *Intellectual Virtues* is an ambitious and radical undertaking in contemporary epistemology that aims at nothing less than a reorientation of the discipline’s scope and approach from its current established form.<sup>444</sup> What is of interest for our purpose of reflecting on spiritual perception, however, is much more modest and pertains mainly to the fecund notion of understanding developed by the authors and its relationship with the epistemic good of acquaintance. What follows in the rest of the chapter is an attempt to utilise this insightful analysis of understanding to explicate what it means to have a spiritual or transformative understanding of the divine address in Scripture. The approach will be to consider the parallels between understanding a literary work and

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<sup>443</sup> Richard Rorty, for instance, has remarked, with regards to textual interpretation, that “the coherence of the text is not something it has before it is described... Its coherence is no more than the fact that somebody has found something interesting to say about a group of marks or noises... a text just has whatever coherence it happened to acquire during the last roll of the hermeneutical wheel”. Rorty’s view implies that the construction one performs upon the text is purely subjective and arbitrary. Rorty (1992), p.97.

<sup>444</sup> John Turri describes this new approach as “plumbing the depths of epistemic psychology by subtly characterising the nature of, and interrelations among, a host of intellectual traits”. Turri (2011), p.793.



Scripture.<sup>445</sup> Although the Christian Scripture is not merely a literary work, it certainly contains a literary dimension and many of the points that hold for understanding literature are just as valid for the understanding of Scripture.<sup>446</sup> Moreover, there are also some rather significant parallels between the two that are of important relevance for our purposes and by considering them side by side it could illuminate for us what is involved in the understanding of Scripture.<sup>447</sup> With this said, we shall now turn our attention to examine the nature of literary understanding.

### 5.3 Literary Understanding

It has been noted by Roberts and Wood that literary works, especially works of great profundity, allow for multiple divergent ways of understanding and admit of differing degrees of depth in understanding.<sup>448</sup> This point is generally valid, not only for literary works, but also more broadly for works or objects with sufficient complexity and depth. Understanding, as mentioned earlier, requires a grasping, making and following of the many connections and relations that are relevant to the object of understanding. Therefore, the more complex and profound the object is, the more difficult it becomes to have an exhaustive grip on all the relevant connections and relations. When the object of understanding is a great literary work or the Christian Scripture, it seems that there can be no bounds to our

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<sup>445</sup> The choice of term ‘literary work’ over the more commonly used term, ‘text’, in theology and postmodern literary theory is deliberate. The choice reflects my agreement with Peter Lamarque’s judgment that “a literary work should not be identified with a bare text”. Lamarque (2010), p.78.

<sup>446</sup> See the next footnote and footnote 412 of this chapter on this point.

<sup>447</sup> The Bible as Scripture does not negate its rich literary character. Hence, Robert Alter observes that “the literary reading of the Bible provides a means of getting in touch again with the religious power of Scripture”. Alter (1992), p.202.

<sup>448</sup> Roberts and Wood (2009), p.44.

understanding of it.<sup>449</sup> Our grasp of its myriad and seemingly endless connections can always be better, richer and more adequate.

In addition to allowing for differing degrees of understanding, for Roberts and Wood, classic literary works such as Shakespeare's *King Lear* also allows for multiple divergent and sometimes incompatible ways of understanding the same work.<sup>450</sup> The phenomenon of "alternative understanding"<sup>451</sup> is somewhat distinct from that of degree of understanding. Whereas degree or depth in understanding pertains to the grasping of complex connections between parts in relation to a perceived coherent whole, alternative understanding is an alternate construal or perception of the whole itself. This distinction can best be seen by considering the parallel example of a switch of construal in the perception of a gestalt figure. In the case of the famous duck-rabbit gestalt drawing, one could construal the overall drawing as a duck and go on to have a deeper and more accurate understanding of the connections between the various lines and shapes of the figure in relation to the drawing as a duck. However, when one's construal of the drawing switches over to that of a rabbit, one no longer grasps the connections in relation to the drawing as a duck but as a rabbit. Here, it is not merely that one is having a deeper and more insightful grasp of the parts in relationship to the same whole; rather, the perception of the whole itself has changed. Consequently, the connections that were previously grasped in relation to the drawing as a duck may well be irrelevant or incompatible with the connections grasped in relation to the drawing as a rabbit and hence might offer no aid in deepening the present understanding of the gestalt figure as a rabbit.<sup>452</sup> Similarly, in the case of literary understanding, one can come to have a deeper and

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> It is also somewhat analogous to a paradigm shift in scientific understanding where one is no longer trying to get a better hold of the relationships within and in relation to a prior paradigm; instead, it is tantamount to a switching of the paradigm itself. For details, refer to Thomas Kuhn's seminal discussion on the concept of paradigm shift. Kuhn (1962).

more accurate grasp of a work in relation to the same construal (or understanding) of the perceived literary whole, or one could have an alternative understanding of the overall shape of the whole itself.

Depth of understanding and alternate understandings are distinct kinds of phenomena in literary understanding and the reason for their difference, in my view, is that the former is a consequence of its complexity whereas the latter is a result of its textual under-determination. One of the reasons why many literary works open themselves up for alternative understandings is because the texts under-determine the overall coherence and shape of the works. Sometimes the under-determination is a deliberate choice on the part of the author to allow for a kind of open-endedness to his or her work, whereas on other occasions it is due simply to the limitations of natural language. As observed by Wolterstorff, locutions always under-determine the illocutionary act, and the reader is thus required to ‘fill in the gaps’ with his own knowledge, construction and inference regarding the context and illocutionary intention of the author.<sup>453</sup> In the same way, the text under-determines the overall coherence and shape of a literary work. Therefore, readers are called upon to fill in the gaps as to be able to draw together the textual locutions into a coherent overall understanding of the work, and how one ‘fills in the gaps’ might differ for different individuals and communities.

According to Roberts and Wood, distinct alternate understandings can be incompatible with one another but nevertheless be “equally validated by the same text”.<sup>454</sup> The text could be under-determined in such a way as to equally allow for the distinct alternate construals or understandings of the overall coherence of the work. This point, however, should not be taken to imply that all and any understandings of the work’s overall coherence

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<sup>453</sup> Wolterstorff (1995), pp.197-199.

<sup>454</sup> Roberts and Wood (2009), p.47.

are equally valid and faithful to the text. Nor does it mean that there are no normative standards for literary understanding. As Peter Lamarque has argued, the authorship of a literary work “puts important constraints on reading, not least by recognizing purposiveness in the writing and some conception (in the broadest terms) of what kind of achievement is sought”.<sup>455</sup> Some understandings of the work’s overall coherence do not do sufficient justice to the authorship and purposiveness of the work and are hence considered inadequate. One of the key differences between the view of postmodern literary theorists such as Roland Barthes and the position adopted in this chapter is precisely on the ontology of literature.

Postmodernists, in treating literary works as a bare text (a mere string of sentences), have removed the purposiveness of the author from the ontology of the literary work.<sup>456</sup> In contrast, the position adopted here, following Lamarque and Wolterstorff, is to view literature as a work rather than a bare text, and part of what it means to treat literature as work is to recognize that the purposiveness of the author constitutes its ontological status as a work.<sup>457</sup> Many postmodern literary theorists, in removing the author from the literary work, do not see the relevance of the author in one’s understanding of the work and therefore allow for all forms of unconstrained construals to be equally appropriate. And even in cases where there are constraints, the author is considered largely irrelevant to the constraints in place for understanding the text.<sup>458</sup> On the contrary, scholars such as Lamarque and Wolterstorff consider the authorship of a literary work to be essential to its ontological status as a work. Hence, to understand a textual work adequately, one must understand it as an authored work and not merely as bare text. Consequently, the author’s purposiveness in the work must

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<sup>455</sup> Lamarque (2010), p.78.

<sup>456</sup> Barthes in his famous essay, “The Death of the Author”, argues that the author must be removed from the text at all levels. Writing should be focused on the reader rather than the author. Barthes (1978), pp.142-148.

<sup>457</sup> Lamarque (2008), pp.66-81. For Wolterstorff’s position, refer to chapters 8 and 9 of his “Divine Discourse”. Wolterstorff (1995). Also relevant is his discussion on “What is it to compose” in Wolterstorff (1980), pp.62-73.

<sup>458</sup> Stanley Fish, for example, argues that literary interpretation is constrained, but the constraint is derived from the contingent interpretative community rather than what is intrinsic to the work. Fish (1980), p.11.

constitute part of the overall coherence that the reader grasps in the work. This position does not imply that we have to have access to the author's mind, or that there is only one correct interpretation of the work.<sup>459</sup> But what it does imply is that our understanding of the work must be appropriately constrained by the purposiveness of the author. Or, to put it differently, the author's purposiveness has to be part of the overall coherence that we grasp in literary understanding, hence playing a crucial role in constraining the kinds of understandings that are acceptable.

### 5.3.1 The Content of Literary Understanding

Having touched on the above preliminary considerations about literary understanding, we shall now proceed towards a more in-depth consideration of the kinds of relations and content that one is attempting to grasp in understanding a literary work. In continuity with the previous chapter, our reflection shall begin with two of Wolterstorff's earlier but equally significant writings, *Works and Worlds of Art* and *Art in Action*. In these two books, Wolterstorff argues that the most important and pervasive action that is performed through works of art by their maker is what he calls "world projection".<sup>460</sup> In the case of literary works, to project a world is to take up an illocutionary stance towards a certain state of affairs which he identifies with the propositional content of the work. This action of world projection is often performed by means of the author performing other actions such as inscribing sentences in a text. Hence, when Fyodor Dostoyevsky inscribes the text of *The Brothers Karamazov* and takes a certain illocutionary stance towards the propositional

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<sup>459</sup> Hence Wolterstorff argues that to read for authorial discourse is not to enter the "author's psyche" but to discern the public stance that was taken up. Wolterstorff (1995), p.93.

<sup>460</sup> A similar view was developed by Mary Louise Pratt by appealing to speech-act theory. She contends that the composition of narratives is also an act of "displaying a world". Louise Pratt (1977). Wolterstorff (1980), p.ix. Wolterstorff (1980a).

content of the text, he has also thereby performed the action of projecting the world of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The world projected by the work is not limited to the propositional content explicitly mentioned but also includes “whatever else is appropriately extrapolated therefrom”<sup>461</sup>. “Extrapolation”, he notes, is what all readers naturally do when reading texts, including literature.<sup>462</sup> Hence, when we read that someone had lunch across the street, we extrapolate that he had walked across the street even though there is no explicit mention or suggestion of him *walking* across the street anywhere in the text. Through extrapolation, readers thereby ‘flesh out’ and fill in the details of the world projected by the work. However, because there could be many different ways to extrapolate the content of a literary work, the world projected by the work is hence always relative to some practice and principles of extrapolation.<sup>463</sup> As to evaluating these distinct practices, Wolterstorff thinks that there is not a strictly right or wrong manner of extrapolation. Rather, the evaluation of these distinct practices of extrapolation should be based upon the appropriateness of these practices for some value or goal rather than some particular notion of truth or falsehood.<sup>464</sup> Nevertheless, most often, our interest as readers is to understand the world the author has projected by means of the work; hence it is reasonable that we conduct our extrapolation on the basis of the expectations of the author.<sup>465</sup> Besides extrapolation, readers also engage in the process of “elucidation” when reading a work. Elucidation, according to Wolterstorff, is the activity of discerning what belongs to the illocutionary act performed by the author by way of the text. Hence, it is a discovering of what is “explicitly mentioned by the author or suggested by what

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<sup>461</sup> Wolterstorff (2001a), p.206.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Wolterstorff makes a parallel point in another paper, stating that he thinks it is a mistake to speak of “the goal of hermeneutics”. Wolterstorff (2006a), p.36.

<sup>465</sup> Wolterstorff (1980), p.123.

he says”.<sup>466</sup> This activity would often involve discerning what is suggested by way of repetition or focus, the allusions and satire present in the work, and the literary motif hinted at.

The preceding discussion by Wolterstorff provides us with a helpful clarification on what it means to understand a literary work. Drawing upon his treatment, it can be seen that the object and content of literary understanding involves at least two aspects: the illocutionary acts performed by way of the text and the world projected by the literary work. Moreover, his discussion also highlights the point that the way in which these two aspects are grasped is through a process of understanding that could be described as *elucidation* and *extrapolation*.

Apart from the above, Wolterstorff is also quick to point out that there is more to literary discourse than just projecting a world. According to him, literary discourse does not simply present us with the world of the text but presents it in a certain way.<sup>467</sup> Literary authors typically do not only project a world but do so in a particular manner, from a certain point of view, with their particular emphasis, pacing, vividness of description, emotional engagement and narrative structure. All these features of the text are the way in which an author works a text to achieve various content and value in a work. In addition, there is also more to literary discourse than telling a story or projecting a world in a certain way. A literary work often reveals and expresses certain attitudes and views regarding the actual or projected world that goes beyond mere storytelling and the projection of worlds. As Wolterstorff puts it, “there are dimensions to the significance of fictional discourse which even go beyond the fact

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid., p.116. In his other essay “Living within a text”, Wolterstorff defines elucidation “as the activity of figuring out what belongs to some sense of a text”. By “sense of the text” he meant the illocutionary actions performed by the author by way of the text. Wolterstorff (2001a), pp.205-206.

<sup>467</sup> Wolterstorff (1980), p.180.

that it gives us the story in a certain way.”<sup>468</sup> This additional significance over and above the story is what he calls the “supra-story significance” of literary discourse.

Understanding and discerning the workings of the text and its supra-story significance are part of the process of elucidating the text. In that process we attempt to discover what belongs to the content of the illocutionary act or literary discourse. However, it should be noted that not every aspect of the working of the text belongs to the illocutionary content of the literary work.<sup>469</sup> This is an important point that is often missed by theorists like Eugene Botha, Timothy Ward and Kevin Vanhoozer who favour a speech-act approach to Scripture and literary works in general. What they often neglect is the limitations of speech-act theory when applied to works that possess a literary dimension. Hence, Botha is keen to extoll the resourcefulness of speech-act theory for analysing literary texts but fails to mention its serious limitations for that task.<sup>470</sup> Similarly, Ward, in his discussion on the sufficiency of Scripture from a speech-act theoretic perspective, at no time indicated that the theory runs into limitations when applied to the understanding of Scripture.<sup>471</sup> Likewise, his doctoral supervisor, Vanhoozer, argues that understanding Scripture “consists in recognizing illocutionary acts and their results”.<sup>472</sup> He seemingly fails to see the immense limitations of speech-act theory for the task of understanding Scripture. Moreover, even for biblical hermeneuticians like Richard Briggs and David McCabe who recognize the limitations of speech-act theory, remain ambiguous about the precise nature and reasons for its limitations when applied to the study of Scripture and literary works in general.<sup>473</sup> On a related note, David Gorman has perceptively observed that one of the main reasons why many literary scholars have misused speech-act theory in their work is precisely due to their lack of in-

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> My use of ‘illocutionary content’ follows Alston’s usage where it refers to the propositional content of the work together with its illocutionary force. Alston (2000), p.15.

<sup>470</sup> Botha (2007).

<sup>471</sup> Ward (2002).

<sup>472</sup> Vanhoozer (2002), p.180.

<sup>473</sup> Briggs (2001), pp.89-91. McCabe (2011), pp.53-55.



depth understanding of the theory and the nature of its limitations.<sup>474</sup> Gorman's observation is easily applicable to a wide number of contemporary works that employ a speech-act centric approach to biblical studies.

### 5.3.2 The Limitations of Speech-Act Theory for Analysing Literary Content

To help us see the limitations of speech-act theory, let us consider a scenario whereby an individual, Tom, is giving a verbal report of what happened to him earlier. Tom could provide that report in a flat tone of voice or he could render the same report verbatim with appropriate artistic variations in pitch and tone, dramatic pauses, and varying degrees of loudness, for no other reason than its artistic and aesthetic value. Although the illocutionary content of the two reports are exactly the same, nevertheless, there are artistic and aesthetic qualities that are present in the second which are lacking in the first. The reason why the reports share the same illocutionary content despite their aesthetic differences is due to the more general point that the illocutionary act of reporting and its content are dependent on what is said rather than how it is said (i.e., the technique of saying it).<sup>475</sup> The artistry and oratory skills that go into the verbal report make no difference to what is said. If one is being asked whether Tom in fact performed an illocutionary act of reporting what happened to him earlier, the only relevant factors in determining the truth to the question is the kind of illocutionary stance Tom has taken towards his utterance and the propositional content of his utterance. Considerations of the artistic and aural qualities of his report simply do not apply. As emphasised in the previous chapter, the heart of an illocutionary act is its normative and rule-governed character, and because there might be certain qualities that constitute an utterance that do not and cannot alter the speaker's normative illocutionary status in any way

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<sup>474</sup> Gorman (1999), pp.102-106.

<sup>475</sup> Alston makes the same point regarding illocutionary acts of 'expressing' in his account of illocutionary acts. Alston (2000), p.108.

and are not subjected to any conventionally established illocutionary rules, those qualities are hence largely irrelevant to the illocutionary content of the utterance.<sup>476</sup>

The point raised above is equally applicable to literary works in general. There might be certain qualities in a piece of literary writing that is relevant to the excellence of the writing as literature but irrelevant to its illocutionary content. For instance, in the composition of poetry, it is relevant to the excellence of the writing as poetry that the sounds and arrangement of the words used have a certain rhyme and rhythm; however, the same poetic qualities are irrelevant to the illocutionary act and content of the writing. Whether the words used in the writing rhyme in any way has no bearing on the conventional illocutionary rules that are governing the normativity of the various illocutionary types (such as assertives and commissives) and therefore makes no difference to what is being said. Nevertheless, the rhyming characteristic of the words are still present in the actual writing in virtue of the locutionary act one performs in performing the illocutionary act. However, it is important to recognize that the poetic and artistic content is located at the locutionary rather than the illocutionary level. The rhyme of the words is a consideration the author gives at the level of the locutionary act but not at the level of the illocutionary act. The author could have used other semantically equivalent words to secure the same illocutionary content, but because he or she has other poetic and artistic considerations that are not purely illocutionary in nature, the author has chosen to use this particular rhyming locution or sentence instead.

The above point is significant for our discussion on the content of literary understanding, not least because it points to the fact that the literary content of a work might be broader than its illocutionary content. The content of a literary work is complex and draws upon many concepts, practices, standards of excellence and literary rules, many of which are

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<sup>476</sup> This point is made by Alston when he argues that what makes an utterance an illocutionary act of a particular sort is its normative and rule-governed character. *Ibid.*, p.105.

not illocutionary in nature. Therefore, if we are to understand a literary work simply by relating it to illocutionary act type concepts (concepts such as assertives and expressives) we would inevitably fail to pay proper attention to many other aspects of its content that are literarily significant yet irrelevant to the core of illocutionary type concepts. Hence, literary understanding is more than understanding what is said (its illocutionary content) in the sense that the literary content cannot be adequately grasped solely in terms of illocutionary act type concepts. There is a further need to understand and grasp its relations to other concepts, rules and standards of excellence that are literary but not necessarily illocutionary in nature. If we limit our understanding of literature to illocutionary act type concepts and do not sufficiently attend and relate to these literary concepts and standards, we are not attending to the work as literature and hence the limitation of speech-act theory for literary understanding.<sup>477</sup>

The position argued above is therefore much less optimistic regarding the potential of speech-act theory as a suitable general framework for literary criticism as compared to the views propounded by speech-act centric theorists like Mary Louise Pratt, Sandy Petrey, Kevin Vanhoozer and Timothy Ward. These theorists often commit the fallacy of thinking that because literary works can be subjected to insightful speech-act analysis, it is therefore an appropriate hermeneutical tool for the adequate understanding of such works. What is more, many of these theorists also take the further step of assuming that the understanding of a literary work consists primarily in the understanding of the illocutionary acts performed therein.<sup>478</sup> However, what they fail to recognize is that speech-act theory actually considers

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<sup>477</sup> The limitations of speech-act theory have also been noted by Daniel Marcu in a different but related way. He notes that speech-act theory seems oblivious to the way in which messages succeed in persuading its hearers in real life persuasive communications. It ignores the relationship between the rhetorical and emotional elements in the message with the perlocutionary effects achieved by way of the message. However, unlike Marcu, I do not see a limitation as a failure of the theory. The concept of speech-acts is not meant to address issues that Marcu raises and its limitation does not in itself count as a failure. Marcu (2000), pp.1719-1741.

<sup>478</sup> Pratt and Petrey are two influential literary theorists who seem to assume that the understanding of a work lies primarily in the understanding of the illocutionary acts performed therein. Ward would be a good example of their theological counterpart (see the next footnote). Petrey (1990). Louise Pratt (1977). Ward (2002).

many of the essential and most fundamental aspects of literary value to be irrelevant. Therefore, it is not sufficient, from a literary perspective, that the reader simply grasps what is said in the work but also other literary qualities through the particular workings of the text, which would require one to grasp beyond its illocutionary content. There is something to be known or understood of literary significance that is over and above a literary work's illocutionary content but is nevertheless essential to the work as literature.<sup>479</sup> One important example of such extra-illocutionary content is the affective tone of a literary work. It is characteristic of good literature that it not merely projects a world but also allows the reader to adopt a certain affective tone or mode of perception regarding the world of the text through the workings of the text. This affective tone made available through the novel is a kind of content present in the work but is not reducible to its illocutionary content: the propositional content and illocutionary stance of the author. Nor is it a perlocutionary effect. For one, it is not perlocutionary in the same sense that one closes the window as a result of being requested by another to close the window. Rather, there is an important sense in which were I not to adopt or develop this affective tone through the reading of the work, I would not have understood it as fully as I should. Hence, it is closer to Austin's notion of "uptake" rather than the concept of perlocutionary effect.<sup>480</sup> Thus, the affective element of the work, although not reducible to its illocutionary content, remains a distinct kind of content that is not only present in the work but is also essential to its excellence as literature.

The argument presented above is not meant to deny that literary qualities may be present in a literary work's illocutionary content. Literary content that are not illocutionary in nature, such as artistic content, may well be present in an illocutionary act since locutionary

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<sup>479</sup> This very point is the Achilles' heel of Ward's entire argument for the sufficiency of Scripture from a speech-act perspective. Ward argues that "a faithful engagement with Scripture... is one which looks for the speech act, made up of propositional and illocutionary acts... and which then seeks to submit to the perlocutionary effect". What he seemingly fails to grasp is that Scripture does not merely provide her readers with propositional content and its associated illocutionary stance. Ward (2002), p.299.

<sup>480</sup> According to Austin, "uptake" is secured when the audience correctly understood the intended illocutionary act performed. Austin (1975), p.138.

acts are nested within illocutionary acts; hence, the artistry of a work could be present in the illocutionary act in virtue of its locutionary act. However, it remains that the artistic content is irrelevant to the concept of illocutionary act types. Therefore, if we were to analyse literary content solely through the concept of illocutionary content, much of the work's content would be unhelpfully considered irrelevant wrapping.<sup>481</sup> Furthermore, some aspects of the illocutionarily irrelevant content may also be lost in the illocutionary content report (as in the case of Tom's artistic oration in the earlier example).<sup>482</sup>

#### 5.4 Literary and Scriptural Understanding

The significance of literary understanding for our understanding of Scripture should not be neglected, and many of the points that hold for literary understanding seems to apply to Scriptural understanding as well.<sup>483</sup> Similar to literary works, the content of Scripture consists of its illocutionary content and the world projected by the whole of Scripture as a unified work appropriated by God. Moreover, the understanding of the Scriptural work allows for differing degrees of understanding and also distinct alternate understandings. Part of this process of understanding is what Wolterstorff describes as “elucidation” and “extrapolation”. The reader elucidates and extrapolates the work of Scripture to discern its

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<sup>481</sup> This is an important point that many literary theorists seem to be confused over. For example, Botha contends that “with regard to the study of *style* of texts, it appears that speech act theory on the whole has such a comprehensive approach to language usage that much of what can be considered stylistic is indeed accounted for, since speech act theory describes the whole of the communication process from the phonetic level to the level where the structure of the whole utterance becomes important”. What Botha fails to recognize is that much of the stylistic qualities of a work are irrelevant to the concept of illocutionary act types. Therefore, even though they might appear in an illocutionary act in virtue of the non-illocutionary acts (such as the phonetic act) that are nested within, they are not illocutionary in nature and hence would not be suitable candidates for speech-act analysis. Botha (1991), p.81.

<sup>482</sup> An illocutionary content report is a report regarding the illocutionary act performed and its content. It could, for instance, take the following form: “James promised Mary to take her to the concert tomorrow”.

<sup>483</sup> This point was advanced by Hans Frei in his influential work *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. Frei argues that the Bible should be conceived as “writing” and as such requires literary tools for its adequate understanding. Partly due to the influence of Frei and other scholars such as Northrop Frye, Robert Alter and Frank Kermode who all argued in a similar direction, the literary analysis of the Bible has now become commonplace in biblical studies. Frei (1980). Frye (1983). Alter and Kermode (1990).

illocutionary content, the world of the text, and what is suggested by what was said. Furthermore, there is also a literary dimension to Scripture.<sup>484</sup> The artistry of the psalms, the poetry of the book of Job and the narrative of the gospels carry with them an important literary aspect that should not be marginalised. Just as in the case of literary works, Scripture as a unified work is not only concerned with projecting a world with a supra-story significance but is also concerned to project it in a certain way through the workings of the text. Similar to literary content, some aspects of the workings of the text in Scripture may not be illocutionary in nature. Therefore, an adequate grasp of Scripture's content requires an understanding that goes beyond understanding its illocutionary content and projected world. The contents brought about by the workings of the Scriptural text are not irrelevant wrapping for us to circumvent in order to get to the doctrinal core of the Bible.<sup>485</sup> On the contrary, they play an important role in the Scriptural work and a failure to attend to them sufficiently may result in her readers missing something significant.

In the next few sections, we want to examine three important aspects of this literary content that pertains to the workings of the text and consider its significance for literary and Scriptural understanding. We shall first begin with *personal content*, followed by *affective and aesthetic content*, and finally address the *vision* of a work.

#### 5.4.1 Narratives and Personal Content

In a series of publications, Eleonore Stump sets out to examine the notion of “second-person accounts” and its relationship with the kind of knowledge one encounters in

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<sup>484</sup> See footnote 412 of this chapter.

<sup>485</sup> Hans Frei has observed that this was actually the attitude of many biblical scholars in the nineteen and early twentieth century. On one end were historical-critical scholars who mined the Bible for its historical context and origins; on the other, there were those who mined it for its core moral or spiritual “truth”. Frei criticizes these two approaches for missing the literary character of the Bible. Frei (1980), pp.245-266.

narratives.<sup>486</sup> She contrasts second-person accounts with first-person and third-person accounts where a first-person account is an account of one's experience from the first person point of view. In contrast, a third-person account is an account from the third-person point of view, akin to a neurologist's account of one's experiences in terms of neurochemicals and neurons.<sup>487</sup> What is known from the first-person perspective (e.g. my desires and beliefs) would not be apparent from the third person perspective where the account is in terms of neurological descriptions.<sup>488</sup> Between the first and third person account, there is the second-person account. In a second person account, one gives some kind of report of an experience from a second-person point of view, such as when I report your experience by saying "you felt a burning sensation".<sup>489</sup> What is distinctive in a second-person experience (an experience from a second-person point of view), in contrast to a first and third person experience, is that in the former it is necessarily an experience of interacting "consciously and directly with another person who is conscious and present to you as a person", whereas this is not necessarily so for the latter.<sup>490</sup> This last point is of epistemic significance for Stump because she thinks that second-person experiences cannot be reduced to first or third person experiences. There is a distinctive kind of knowledge that is acquired in a direct interaction with other conscious personal beings that is irreducible to propositions or expository prose. To put it differently, second-person experiences (the experience of direct interaction with other persons) provide a source of knowledge that cannot be fully accounted for by propositional knowledge or what Stump calls "knowledge *that*".<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Stump (2010). Stump (2009). Stump (2001).

<sup>487</sup> Stump (2001), p.87.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., pp.86-87.

<sup>489</sup> It is second-person in the sense that the report uses the second person pronoun 'you'.

<sup>490</sup> Stump (2001), pp.87-88.

<sup>491</sup> 'Knowledge that', for Stump, is knowledge in the form of knowing "that something or other is the case'. Stump (2009), p.255.

To support her case, Stump argues convincingly through an adaptation of Frank Jackson's famous thought experiment.<sup>492</sup> She invites us to imagine a world where Mary, a girl captured by a mad scientist from birth, who despite never having any contact with other persons throughout her life nevertheless had exhaustive knowledge about the world, although only in the form of third-person accounts and expository prose. Hence, whilst she has read everything there is to know about other persons, she never had direct interaction and face-to-face contact with anyone. Fortunately, as it turns out, Mary was eventually rescued and reunited with her mother for the first time. Stump then argues that it seems undeniable that at their reunion "Mary will know things she did not know before, even if she knew everything about her mother that could be made available to her in expository prose, including her mother's psychological states".<sup>493</sup> There is, she concludes, a distinct epistemic content with regard to knowledge of persons that is to be had in a second-person experience that cannot be acquired simply by propositional knowing.

This then brings us to the role of narratives. According to Stump, narratives play an important social and epistemic function since it is able to "re-present", at least partially, the distinctive character of second-person experiences (real or fictional), which cannot be captured by expository prose, and make it available to others who are not part of the original experience.<sup>494</sup> Hence, the unique potency of narratives lies in their ability to "transmit a kind of knowledge of persons which is not reducible to knowledge *that*". A narrative is able to accomplish this by giving "its reader some of what she would have had if she had had unmediated personal interaction with the characters in the story while they were conscious and interacting with each other, without actually making her part of the story itself".<sup>495</sup> Other than narratives, Stump thinks that there might also be other literary devices that are able to

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<sup>492</sup> Jackson's original thought experiment is published in Jackson (1986).

<sup>493</sup> Stump (2001), p.88.

<sup>494</sup> Stump (2009), p.258.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., p.259.



transmit this distinctive personal epistemic content as well. For instance, poetry with little narrative structure may also capture and re-present for us the interactions of persons. Poems and songs that render a graphic and vivid depiction of personal relations and interactions may serve the same epistemic function as narratives even without resorting to an explicit narrative structure.<sup>496</sup>

Stump then applies this account of narrative function to the problem of evil in the book of Job. She argues that, contrary to the views of some biblical commentators, Job did manage to get a satisfying response from God regarding the evil and suffering he was made to undergo. However, the response, by way of a series of divine speeches, did not come in expository form but as a story-like second-person account. It conveys “in the vivid sort of way a story would a picture, an impression, of God’s entering into personal relations with all parts of his creation and of his dealing with his creatures in maternal ways.”<sup>497</sup> Moreover, in his discourse with God, Job is also enjoying a distinct second-experience: the experience of direct personal interaction with God. Therefore, in the midst of Job’s conversation with God, he was able to have access to a source of non-propositional knowledge regarding God’s personal love and goodness. This knowledge, although inexpressible in expository prose, nevertheless allows Job to know God’s deep and unbreakable love for him in the midst of his suffering and, as such, constitutes a deeply satisfying explanation for him. However, since this second-person experience cannot be adequately conveyed through expository prose, the best one could do to capture that experience for the benefit of others who are not a part of it is to turn the experience into a story-like narrative as we have in the book of Job.<sup>498</sup>

Stump’s account of second-person experience and its relation to narratives is significant for our discussion on literary and scriptural understanding. A work of literature

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<sup>496</sup> Stump (2001), p.89.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., p.99.

often adopts a narrative structure due to its capacity to present a distinctive sort of experience and epistemic content regarding knowledge of persons that expository prose cannot manage as well. Hence, literary understanding involves a grasping of this characteristic personal content through an understanding of its narrative presentation. This point is equally true for the understanding of Scripture as Stump has shown in her discussion on the book of Job. If she is right in her assessment, then a failure to understand and grasp the distinct second-person experience in the story of Job will also result in an inability to adequately understand the book as a whole. Unless one can grasp, at least partially, the kind of knowledge that Job has through the second-person experiences, one would not be able to draw together a coherent and satisfying understanding of the work that does justice to the purposiveness of the author. Therefore, the understanding of Scripture is as much a grasping of its personal content (especially personal content regarding the person of God) as it is with its illocutionary content and textual world.

#### 5.4.2 Aesthetic and Affective Content

In addition to personal content, literary content also covers what can be described as aesthetic and affective content. Mark Wynn, in an intriguing discussion about affective representation in art and religion, proposes a way to understand the affective content present in a work of art and its relation to aesthetics.<sup>499</sup> He begins by making a distinction between the “real” and “affective essence” of an object. The real essence of an object is its true metaphysical or scientific nature. The affective essence of a thing, however, is something quite different and could be thought of as the object’s “defining qualities from the point of

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<sup>499</sup> Wynn (2005), pp.149-178.

view of human affective experience”<sup>500</sup>. More precisely, it is the defining and distinctive feel and affective experience of the object as it “bears on our concerns for good or ill”.<sup>501</sup> In other words, it is its “felt significance for human life” that befits the object.<sup>502</sup> To take an example, the real essence of the sun would be a gaseous mix of hydrogen and helium or whatever its true scientific nature is. The affective essence of the sun, however, would presumably be the feel of intensity, clarity, refreshment, life and vitality. Such feelings towards the sun are the way in which we affectively experience the significance of the sun for us in our communities and everyday life; it is the ‘feel’ that arises from the sun impinging upon our human concerns in daily life. This affective essence, because of its subjective character, would be different for different communities. Modern dwellers do not experience the significance of the sun in the same way that ancient agricultural communities do. Hence, the defining felt human significance of the sun would be very different for the respective communities. Moreover, their understanding of the world and reality would also be vastly dissimilar and this divergence of understanding also contributes to the difference in their perception and felt significance of the sun.

According to Wynn, the affective essence of an object could be represented in a work of art. Thus, a piece of music, a poem or a literary work could conjure up certain feelings within us that capture some of an object’s defining affective qualities for that community. Such affective representation is distinct from an affectively neutral representation, since the former discloses “the human significance of the object” in a way the latter does not.<sup>503</sup> Moreover, serious works of art, especially religious art, often do not merely reveal an object’s human significance but also its “existential significance”; that is, it reveals the significance of

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid., p.150.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., p.151.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

an object as it relates to the community's deepest and all-encompassing concerns.<sup>504</sup> In this way, serious works of art such as literature could take on an existential depth that comes close to a religious or quasi-religious meaning or overtone.

The affective essence of a work of art is also intimately related to its aesthetic properties. Wynn thinks that the way in which a work of art is able to represent the affective essence of an object is through its aesthetic qualities. A work of art is often crafted in such a way as to elicit a certain kind of feeling that befits the object it is depicting. The aesthetics or look and feel of a work is therefore not merely ornamental but serves an important function of inviting a certain kind of affective response to the work. An excellent work of art typically succeeds in engendering the feelings that befit the object it is representing, and in doing so allows the represented object to "appear as present" by providing a defining affective experience for her audience.<sup>505</sup>

Wynn's notion of affective essence is potentially illuminating for our reflections on literary and Scriptural understanding, and I suggest that there are two points we could bring forward from his work for our discussion. First, Scripture and literary works in general could capture the affective essence of an object, event or situation by revealing its human significance through the artistry and workings of the text by the author. The more skilful the author, the better she would be able to provide an affective experience that is distinctive and characteristic of the object being presented. Second, the grasping of this affective essence or content of the work, which I shall term *affective understanding*, involves an understanding of the human significance of the object, event or situation that the literary work is attempting to capture. Such affective understanding differs from mere cognitive understanding in important ways. One could understand the significance of an object in a cold, detached and affectively

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid., p.165.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., p.160.

neutral manner. Affective understanding, however, is more than that. In affective understanding, one grasps the connections and relevance of a situation, event, or object to the affective dimension of one's life – that is, one's concerns, desires, fears, attachments, enjoyments and aspirations. Without such appropriate affective understanding of the literary work, the reader potentially misses a vital aspect of the literary point and content of the work.<sup>506</sup> Therefore, in light of the above two points, I suggest that Scriptural understanding involves an affective understanding that grasps the affective content of the Scriptural work, and in doing so one also apprehends the characteristic and defining felt human significance of the objects, characters, situations and events presented by Scripture.

#### 5.4.3 Literary and Scriptural Vision

In our discussion thus far, we have covered four aspects of literary and Scriptural understanding: the understanding of the illocutionary content, the world of the text, the personal content and, lastly, the aesthetic and affective content. These aspects are not meant to be exhaustive categories of the content and object of literary understanding, but they are highlighted for their significance to the transformative understanding of Scripture which we shall address later. In addition to what was mentioned, there is another aspect that is important for literary and Scriptural understanding, an aspect that can only be best described as a work's vision.

Peter Lamarque, in his writings on the philosophy of literature, has repeatedly argued that one of the most important values in a literary work is the *vision* it provides for her

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<sup>506</sup> Susan Feagin has argued for this point in depth in her book-length treatment of the subject. Her main thesis is that “to appreciate a work is, in part, to get the value out of it, and “getting the value out of it” involves being affectively or emotionally moved”. In a similar vein, Jenefer Robinson contends that “emotions function to alert us to important aspects of the story such as plot, characters, setting and point of view... without appropriate emotional responses some novels simply cannot be understood.” Feagin (1996), p.1. Robinson (2005), p.107.

readers.<sup>507</sup> Drawing upon the work of Iris Murdoch, he characterises *vision* as a way of seeing the world, the acquiring of a certain perspective where the emphasis lies in what the literary work shows us rather than “what it states or implies propositionally”.<sup>508</sup> The acquiring of this literary vision is at its heart not a matter of gaining propositional truths through its literary theme or content, nor is it about acquiring true beliefs regarding the actual world. More importantly, it pertains to the way in which the work “invites us to see the world in new ways”, to adopt a different perspective or outlook.<sup>509</sup> Therefore, it does not matter as much if the work is fictional in nature or that its literary theme does not correspond with reality, what is of significance from a literary point of view is the kind and quality of “seeing” involved.<sup>510</sup> Serious literary works address various literary themes that are of significant human interest and allow her readers to have “imaginative access” to these themes of a certain quality.<sup>511</sup> For example, in reading a work like Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*, the point is not that one learns the truth or acquires the belief that men are subject to arbitrary forces beyond their control but, more importantly, that one grasps through the work how the world appears to one who is trapped in such an existence. For Lamarque, the novel’s capacity to afford such a perspective or mode of “seeing” for her readers, not just intellectually but also emotionally, is an important literary achievement and one of the reasons why we value it.

Lamarque maintains that the aesthetic qualities of a work is intimately related to its literary value due to the fact that a “novel’s value resides in the working of the theme, not in

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<sup>507</sup> Lamarque (1995); Lamarque (1996); Lamarque (2008).

<sup>508</sup> Lamarque (1995), p.244. See also Murdoch’s own treatment of the relationship between literature and ‘moral vision’ in her two papers, “Vision and Choice in Morality” and “On ‘God’ and ‘Good’”. Murdoch (1999). Murdoch (2001).

<sup>509</sup> Lamarque (1996), p.97.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid., p.105.

<sup>511</sup> Lamarque (1995), p.249. John Henry Newman’s distinction between a “notional” and “imaginative” assent to theological truths is a close parallel to Lamarque’s point. The former is a bare propositional statement of the doctrine while the latter involves an imaginative imaging of the same truth in appropriate ways. Newman argues that Christian worship primarily involves “imaginative assent” rather than “notional assent”. Newman (1979), p.108.

the theme's bare propositional content".<sup>512</sup> In reading a novel, our literary interest is usually not in the bare propositional content of its theme and plotlines. Rather, what we value is the literary skill and artistry in which the theme and plotlines are developed and sustained. The aesthetic qualities of a work hence play an important part in literary value and the vision it affords. The vividness of the description, the details it attends to, the emotional depth of the characters; these are all factors that determine the quality of the literary vision that a work provides for her readers and, in turn, its literary value. Thus, he concludes that

To value a literary work for its own sake is not to value it for the truths it imparts or for the morality of its vision or for its ability to improve human lives. The great works of literature are not great because they make better or more moral or more knowledgeable readers but because they offer something strikingly unique, they show the very limits to which the medium of language can be stretched, and they create a 'world' or vision often far beyond the powers of imagination of mere mortals. The great literary works stand with the great paintings or musical works or sculptures as monuments of human creativity, objects of wonder and delight, inviting amazement that such human achievements are possible.<sup>513</sup>

Lamarque's category of *literary vision* is, I think, significant for our discussion on the understanding of Scripture. As to whether it is the fundamental value of literature, that is not an issue we need to consider for our purpose. What is of relevance for us is the transformative role it plays in our encounter with God in Scripture. However, before we can relate the notion of literary vision to Scriptural understanding there is a need to provide a further explication and expansion of the concept beyond the cursory characterisation provided by Lamarque.

Building on Lamarque's work and our ongoing discussion, I suggest that the notion of literary vision can be understood from either the author's or reader's perspective. From the author's side, to use the categories of Wolterstorff, the writer in authoring a work projects a world in a certain way with a certain supra-story significance, and this in effect projects a vision of some world, a way of seeing some world from some perspective. The visual

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<sup>512</sup> Lamarque (2008), p.239.

<sup>513</sup> Lamarque (2010), p.80.

metaphor here is apt because the point of a literary work is not merely to ‘create’ a world but to fashion one that is perceived through a certain point of view with a certain mode of perception that is both cognitive and affective in nature.

On the other end, from the reader’s perspective, the acquiring of a literary vision is a complex phenomenon that I propose can be best understood as an amalgamation of understanding, construal and perceptual-like experiences. Earlier in the chapter, we noted the intimate relationship between understanding and perceptual experiences.<sup>514</sup> Building on this prior discussion, I suggest that the same kind of relationship holds for literary vision. In literary vision, the reader adopts a kind of construal (which is a species of understanding), guided by the author, regarding the world of the text which results in certain perceptual experiences. In that construal, the reader draws together the various elements of the work into a coherent whole as cued by the author. This construal is also a mode of perception as the reader perceives the whole by construing the elements of the work in a certain appropriate manner. Such a construal, at least in good literary works, is as much affective as it is cognitive. The construal takes as its terms affective elements (such as one’s concerns, affective instincts, emotional attachments, feelings and desires) as well as non-affective elements (such as propositions and epistemic judgments) and synthesises them together under some organising structure to produce a coherent and unified understanding-experience. This understanding-experience is often a perceptual-like experience where the readers are epistemically acquainted with the appearance or impression of the textual world as projected by the author. Hence, for example, in reading Kafka’s *The Trial*, the text is worked in such a way so as to produce various understanding-experiences through which one is acquainted with the pessimistic and depressing appearance of the world. Moreover, these acquaintances

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<sup>514</sup> See section 5.2.1



and experiences are generated in such a way that one could not have access to them simply by reading the bare propositional theme of the work.

The acquisition of a literary vision by the reader is hence constituted by two aspects. On one hand, it is a way of seeing, construing or understanding the world of the text and its supra-story significance as guided by the author and organised around some theme of human interest. On the other, it is also a kind of perceptual-like understanding-experience that arises out of that complex construal and understanding. Such an understanding-experience in turn allows the reader to enjoy epistemic acquaintance with the appearance of the textual world as projected by the author. The acquisition of a literary vision covers both facets, and the two aspects are of course closely related; we can only perceive and be epistemically acquainted with what the literary world is like by allowing our understanding or construal to be affected, structured and guided by the author through the literary work.

#### 5.4.3.1 The Vision of Scripture

Having expanded on the fertile notion of literary vision, we can now consider its significance for our discussion on the understanding of Scripture. To this, I propose that just as literary works project a particular vision, Scripture, in a parallel fashion, also projects a certain vision regarding the world of the text. The grasping of this vision is part of what is involved in the understanding of Scripture.<sup>515</sup> God, in appropriating the various discourses as his own unified discourse in the Christian Bible, has also at the same time projected a vision of the Scriptural world through the biblical text. This Scriptural vision is a kind of seeing or perceiving of the world of Scripture with a certain mode of perception (or construal) from a certain perspective. Furthermore, the vision that Scripture affords may also emerge at

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<sup>515</sup> David Brown argued for something similar to a literary vision of Scripture when he contends that the words of Scripture are not meant merely to “convey information”; rather, they “have the power to open us up to new worlds.” Brown (2008), p.67.

different levels. While the individual works within the canon may project their individual vision, the entire Christian Scripture as a unified work could yet project its own particular vision by bringing together and synthesising its constituent works into a sui generis vision of its own. This vision at the level of the whole of the Christian Scripture is also a vision regarding its key subject matter: God's reconciliation of humanity to himself in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19). Hence, Scriptural vision is at its core a specifically gospel-shaped vision of God within the world of the text.

#### 5.4.4 Understanding Scripture

The foregoing discussion highlights for us the nature of understanding and what it is like to understand a work like Scripture by considering the parallels that the Bible shares with literary works. In light of what was said, it could be concluded that understanding Scripture is an extremely complex task which requires the reader to grasp not only the illocutionary content and the world of the text, but also other aspects of the Scriptural content that may or may not be relevant to the concept of illocutionary content (such as its personal, affective and aesthetic content). The understanding of the content of Scripture in turn makes possible for the understanding of Scripture's overall vision and the understanding-experiences that arises from that particular gospel-shaped vision projected by the Bible. The complex and demanding task of Scriptural understanding hence constantly requires one to learn to read the Bible better and improve upon one's understanding.<sup>516</sup>

Beyond its literary character and value, the understanding of Scripture also serves a broader soteriological purpose, at least according to Edwards' doctrine of spiritual understanding. For the remainder of the chapter we want to return to the central task of the

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<sup>516</sup> Hence, the influential collection of essays on theological hermeneutics, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, is dedicated precisely to the subject of learning to read Scripture better. Davis and Hays, eds. (2003).

dissertation and consider the significance of our discussion for contemporising Edwards' theory of spiritual understanding and perception.

### 5.5 Spiritual Perception and the Transformative Understanding of Scripture

In Edwards' thinking, Scripture is of course not merely a literary work but a gift of God to humanity to serve his soteriological purposes and resource her readers to grow in love, fellowship and communion with God and the body of Christ. For this reason, he was eager to emphasise that a proper understanding of Scripture ought to be a spiritual understanding – that is, a perceiving or sensing of God's divine glory and goodness in the understanding of Scripture that motivates one towards love for God.<sup>517</sup> Here, Edwards points to a particular manner of understanding Scripture that transcends any kind of literary understanding. Our understanding of Scripture is to be soteriological in some sense, giving rise to the love for God and the fruit of faith. This notion of understanding Scripture soteriologically is theologically significant, and in the final segment of this chapter we want to reflect upon this concept and consider its relationship with the content and vision of the Bible.

To begin, it would be helpful to first clarify some of the terms that are being used. When we speak of a soteriological understanding of God's divine address in Scripture, that phrase can be understood in two ways. In the previous chapter, we explored one of the ways in which Scripture can be understood soteriologically; namely, by attending to its normative dimension and in virtue of which enter into a normative engagement with the divine speaker. The other way, which is the focus of this chapter, centers on the psychological transformation of her readers such that they are moved to obedience, repentance, faith and love. The normative and the psychological are of course intimately related to the broader soteriological purposes of God. As mentioned previously, God's divine speech-acts initiate a normative

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<sup>517</sup> WJE 2:270-272.

relationship for his addressees and mark the beginning of one's soteriological relationship with him. However, to complete the soteriological process, it is not enough that one's normative status has been altered; her motivations, character and attitudes have to be transformed as well. Hence, for the rest of the thesis, I shall use the term 'soteriological understanding' to cover both the normative and psychological dimension and 'transformative understanding' to denote simply the psychological transformation in the reading of Scripture. With this clarification, we shall now turn our attention to the transformative understanding of Scripture.

A transformative understanding of Scripture, according to Edwards' doctrine of spiritual understanding, is at its heart to grasp the supreme value and goodness of God in the understanding of Scripture. It is such spiritual understanding that leads one to a love for God and drives the psychological transformation of believers in the reading of Scripture. However, Edwards views the role of Scripture in spiritual understanding to be causally non-integral. As alluded to previously, one key reason for his position has to do with how the nature of Scripture's content is conceived. For Edwards, Scripture's content ultimately amounts to a series of notional signs that signify ideas in the mind.<sup>518</sup> As such, the understanding of Scripture's content does not provide her readers with the gracious affections but is simply the necessary means for them. That is to say, the understanding of Scripture's content provides the opportunity for the occurrence of the gracious affections by furnishing the mind with the necessary notions and subject matter of the Christian doctrines, but it does not in any way communicate the supernatural affections towards these doctrines, not even partially. Rather, the Spirit alone is the "proper cause" of the religious affections. This is also why Edwards insists that Scripture has no causal influence to produce the gracious affections even though it

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<sup>518</sup> WJE 18:84-87.

is the “principal means of grace”.<sup>519</sup> Contra Edwards, in light of the discussion in this chapter, I contend that Scripture’s content cannot be conceived as mere notional signs. Moreover, the understanding of Scripture’s content does in fact play a central and causally integral role in our affective understanding-experience of God’s goodness because it provides her readers with a unique and essential way of understanding his supreme value through its content and vision.

The crucial difference between Edwards’ position and the one advocated here lies precisely in the nature of Scripture’s content. If Scripture is merely a series of signs, then it would be appropriate to suggest, as Edwards did, that it does not play an integral role in generating the gracious affections. For just as the word ‘sweet’ cannot communicate to us the sensation of sweetness, in the same way, the words of Scripture cannot communicate to us the life-giving affective sensation (or experience) of divine beauty and glory. However, if Scripture’s content were conceived more along the lines suggested in this chapter, then its content does in fact play an integral role in experiencing the divine excellency of the great gospel truths as presented by Scripture. For in this case, Scripture’s content centrally structures and constitutes one’s understanding of divine value in a way mere notional signs do not. It grants the reader a certain way of understanding God’s goodness from a particular perspective with its unique Scriptural vision and therefore has an important causal influence in the formation of the holy affections. Notional signs, on the other hand, have nothing of the aforementioned literary-like qualities. They merely signify and indicate what the subject matter is about and hence do not play a foundational role in structuring one’s understanding

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid., p.84. “Divine Love Alone,” in WJE 8:360.

and perception in ways that are central, essential and integral for the sui-generis perception of divine glory.<sup>520</sup> Let us unpack this idea a little further.

#### 5.5.1 The Role of Scripture in Spiritual Perception

As with understanding any complex object, the understanding of God's goodness in Scripture comes in differing depth and allows for distinct alternate ways of understanding; hence, one could always have a deeper and better understanding of divine goodness. For example, a person could come to understand God's supreme goodness in a purely intellectual manner, perhaps through a series of inferences from the cosmological argument, but nevertheless fails to understand the goodness of God in relation to his desires, longings and concerns. Such a person does not understand God's goodness 'in his heart'; that is to say, he does not grasp the connection between the goodness of God and his personal concerns, desires and loves, nor is he acquainted with his goodness through emotional delight.<sup>521</sup> There are potentially an infinite number of connections and relations that one could grasp regarding the goodness of God and many of these relations are intellectual as well as affective or emotional in nature. However, if a person's understanding of divine value is to be transformative in the sense described in the previous section, it has to at least be of sufficient depth such that one grasps the appropriate connections between God's supreme goodness and her life as a whole, especially her heart (one's deepest concerns, desires, loves and

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<sup>520</sup> Alan Torrance argues similarly for the points raised here. He contends that language use cannot be thought of as merely referring to stable "essences" and observes that the way language is used has a direct influence upon the "apperceptions" of its users. Torrance (1996), pp.328-329.

<sup>521</sup> This is also the way Edwards thought of the distinction between "speculative" and "sensible" knowledge. A sensible knowledge of God's goodness is one that engages the inclinations of the heart or will, while speculative knowledge does not. WJE 2:272.

motivations). An understanding that does not relate to the depths of a person's affective life would not be one that moves and motivates her to genuine love for God.<sup>522</sup>

Scripture plays an important causal role in the transformative heart-understanding of God's goodness described above because of the way in which it shapes our apprehension of divine value. As we have seen over the course of our discussion, the content of Scripture is more than its illocutionary content and textual world; it also includes its personal, affective and aesthetic content. Each aspect of the Scriptural content contributes to our understanding of the supreme value of God in its own distinct way. The illocutionary content conveys to us the goodness of what was being said, while the personal content communicates a distinct second-person experience that allows us to grasp the excellence of the divine person of God and the human person of Christ in ways that cannot be fully captured in expository prose. Furthermore, the affective and aesthetic content reveals the human and existential significance of God and provides for us an understanding of God's goodness in relation to the affective and existential dimensions of our lives.

In addition to the above, Scripture also allows us to apprehend and grasp the supreme value of God by affording its readers a kind of vision that is akin to literary vision. However, unlike some literary visions, the vision of Scripture is deeply concerned with reality. God projects a certain vision through Scripture not ultimately for literary or artistic reasons, but because it is in some sense profoundly true. As argued by Wolterstorff, Scripture contains "true words", not in the narrow sense of correspondence with facts but in a more robust sense of "measuring up".<sup>523</sup> Scripture's true vision measures up to the greatness and excellency of

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<sup>522</sup> This is an important Edwardsean point. It is the reason why Edwards gives the religious affections such an important place in the Christian life. Affections are directly related to one's motivations and love for God; therefore, a soteriological knowledge of God must be "sensible" or affective in nature. *Ibid.*, pp.272-273.

<sup>523</sup> Wolterstorff (2006), pp.42-43.

God and allows her readers to perceive him as they should.<sup>524</sup> Therefore, we come to Scripture not only to know what God had said or acquire certain true beliefs, but also to learn to perceive and be epistemically acquainted with his supreme goodness through the vision that Scripture provides. The acquiring of this vision is an important part of what it means to understand Scripture transformatively as the reader comes to grasp the connections between God's goodness and the affective dimension of her heart. Hence, it could potentially alter one's loves and motivations towards God in a way that notional or speculative understanding in itself could not. The content of Scripture therefore plays a causally integral role in bringing about the transformative heart-understanding of divine value that notional signs as mere signifiers do not.

Besides being integral, the vision and content of Scripture also affords a unique means of understanding the value of God. Scripture is unique because, according to much of the Christian tradition, it is the very word or discourse of God and therefore constitutes a way of understanding divine goodness and worthiness that is somehow authored by God in a manner that no other understanding is. Due to its divine authorship, it is hence also a kind of divine value understanding which is in some sense addressed to the church from God and thereby constitutes a particular mode of understanding that is uniquely privileged and normative for his people.<sup>525</sup>

## 5.6 Conclusion

Therefore, for all the above reasons, Scripture is essential and integral to the generation of spiritual perception. The fundamental reason for this is that Scripture centrally

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<sup>524</sup> Janet Soskice and Sue Patterson argue for a related point regarding the function of religious metaphors that we find in the Bible. For Soskice, metaphors have a capacity for "reality-depiction" and serves to appropriately depict a transcendent God one cannot directly describe. Drawing on the work of Soskice, Patterson claims that "all metaphor implicitly, and theological metaphor explicitly, mediates God as Truth". Martin Soskice (1985), p.137. Patterson (1993), p.26.

<sup>525</sup> Refer to section 4.5 for a discussion on the sense in which Scripture is addressed to the church.



constitutes one's normative understanding of divine value and is therefore essential and causally integral to the normative and affective understanding-experience of God's goodness. Whereas Edwards tends to underplay the role of Scripture in spiritual perception and rendered it non-integral, we have sought to continue with the "recovery of the Word" that began in the previous chapter and establish the transformative "weight" of Scripture in spiritual perception. Contra Edwards, on the contemporised account of spiritual perception we are developing here, Scripture's content is not reducible to mere notional signs that refer to ideas in the mind, nor does it merely provide an opportunity for the formation of the gracious affections. Instead, it consists of affective, personal and aesthetic content that renders it to be thought of more appropriately as literary artefacts rather than notional signs. Moreover, the experience of gracious affections in the reading of Scripture is itself an emotional understanding-experience and response to the Scriptural work, and is thus causally and intrinsically related to the understanding that the work's literary qualities draws us into. Mere signs, on the other hand, bear no such intrinsic relationship with the affective experience.

In the last analysis, Edwards' Lockean theory of language has misled him regarding the nature of Scripture's content. Consequently, the position he adopts seems rather extreme, driving too hard a divide between Scripture and the gracious affections and thereby failing to give due recognition to their intimate and integral relationship. Nevertheless, to affirm that Scripture is essential and integral to spiritual perception does not therefore imply that it is sufficient for its generation. As emphasised by Edwards, spiritual perception is a qualitatively distinct kind of perception that requires the grace of infusion. How, then, does the content of Scripture interact with the infused disposition to generate spiritual delight? This is an issue that will be explored in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Six: Spiritual Delight**

### 6.1 Introduction

In chapter three, we examined the first major component of Edwards' theory of spiritual perception – the infusion of grace – in conversation with the work of William Alston and developed an account of infusion as the sharing of Christ's Trinitarian-human unitive drive with believers by the Spirit. In the subsequent two chapters, we considered the second key component in his theory, the content of Scripture, and touched on the unique and integral role that Scripture's content plays in generating spiritual perception. For the current chapter, our focus is on the final key component of Edwards' theory – spiritual delight.

According to Edwards, it is in spiritual delight that believers perceive and experience the goodness and beauty of God through the interaction of the work of the Spirit and the content of Scripture. Our purpose here is hence to examine this notion of spiritual delight in greater detail, beginning with a discussion on Edwards' view of the relationship between spiritual delight, the work of the Spirit, Scriptural content and Christian sanctification. Following that, we will consider the ways in which the two unsatisfactory aspects of Edwards' thinking on this area can be revised in light of our ongoing discussion. Lastly, we will then address the issue of how spiritual delight serves to bring about love for God and the capacity to overcome temptation and sin. With this structure in mind, we shall proceed and begin with Edwards' view on spiritual delight.

### 6.2 Spiritual Delight and the Psychology of Sanctifying Grace

Spiritual perception, according to Edwards, is distinctly characterised by a kind of unique delight towards the goodness of God that is made possible only through the infusion of the Spirit and the understanding of the great truths of Scripture. Such spiritual perception

or understanding is also for him profoundly transformative in nature, in virtue of the experience of spiritual delight inherent within. This new delight or relish captivates the hearts of the saints and consequently brings about a radical change in their motivations, inclinations and attitudes towards divine realities. In other words, the new spiritual sense or taste of divine goodness, in the form of spiritual delight, functions as the psychological source for the saints' transformation of their character, inclinations and behaviours. The experience of *sui generis* spiritual delight opens up new sources of enjoyments, appreciations and motivations for actions within the psychological constitution of the regenerate that are not previously available to them as a natural man. Thus, for Edwards, spiritual delight has an important sanctifying effect on the saints. In his sermon, *The Pure in Heart Blessed*, he asserts that it is the spiritual appetite or taste that governs the soul of the pure in heart, allowing them to take the greatest delight in spiritual enjoyments and consequently come to choose such enjoyments over sinful ones. Therefore, the pure in heart are those whose spiritual appetites prevail over sinful ones.<sup>526</sup> Edwards' reasoning here serves to highlight the pivotal role of the spiritual sense in his psychology of sanctification. The spiritual sense as a kind of experienced supernatural delight empowers and motivates the saints to overcome the dominion of sinful pleasures in their lives. Thus, James Hoopes makes the point well in his analysis of Edwards' religious psychology when he states that, for Edwards, the saint's "personality is so transformed by new taste and desires that the redeemed can never return entirely to his old sinful ways".<sup>527</sup>

The basic outline of Edwards' psychology of sanctifying grace can therefore be thought of as a love for God for his own sake that arises from one's spiritual delight in his moral beauty and holiness. Such a delight is one that is experienced in a kind of spiritual perception or sense that is made possible only by the infusion of the Holy Spirit in one's heart

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<sup>526</sup> "The Pure in Heart Blessed," in WJE 17:81.

<sup>527</sup> Hoopes (1983), p.862.

and the furnishing of the mind with the ideas provided by the content of Scripture. Moreover, this spiritual delight is also an important sanctificatory effect of infused grace (i.e., the indwelling Spirit) since it is a delight *by which* one is sanctified and made obedient to God. More precisely, spiritual delight brings about a love and desire for God by allowing the regenerate to enjoy spiritual realities in a way not possible before and thereby motivating them to choose spiritual and godly enjoyments over sinful ones.

### 6.3 The Three Forms of Spiritual Delight

It is important to recognize that spiritual delight, for Edwards, is not an amoral subjective pleasure or enjoyment but is in fact a manifestation of true virtue. In his treatise on *True Virtue*, Edwards maintains that “true virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to Being in general”. That is to say, true virtue is a loving consent or agreement towards the happiness and welfare of “the universal system of existence”.<sup>528</sup> On the other hand, a loving benevolence towards only a limited part of the great whole is not truly virtuous, even though it might very well in some restricted sense be considered good.<sup>529</sup>

In addition to the love of benevolence, Edwards also identifies another kind of love which he calls the love of complacence. The latter is, according to him, a loving and delighting in the beauty of another being. The two types of love differ crucially in that whereas the love of complacence is a love of and attraction towards another’s beauty, the love of benevolence does not presuppose the beauty of its object of love and hence could manifest itself as an inclination towards the welfare of those who are not beautiful.<sup>530</sup> Nevertheless, the two loves are intimately related, with benevolence serving as the basis for

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<sup>528</sup> "True Virtue," in WJE 8:540-541.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., p.541.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid., p.542.

the love or delight of complacence.<sup>531</sup> Edwards held that a virtuous delight of complacence is directed towards the beauty of one's "benevolent propensity to Being in general".<sup>532</sup> In other words, true virtue as manifested in the love of benevolence is itself true "spiritual beauty" and hence serves as the proper object of a virtuous delight of complacence.<sup>533</sup> Moreover, on the Edwardsean way of thinking, God is the most benevolent being and thus possesses the greatest degree of spiritual or moral beauty. He is hence also the foremost object of all virtuous delight.<sup>534</sup>

According to Edwards, a truly virtuous delight is fundamentally a spiritual delight; that is, it is a delight grounded in the Spirit of God. He reasons that a person is able to perceive "benevolence to Being in general" as beautiful and delight in it only because one is already under the influence of such benevolence.<sup>535</sup> On the Edwardsean framework, beauty is fundamentally a kind of harmony or consent. Hence, only when there is a harmonious consent between the benevolent propensity within a person and the virtue of benevolence one perceives in the world, is there a delightful experience of virtuous benevolence as beautiful. This inner benevolent propensity within the perceiving subject is, for Edwards, equivalent to the infused spiritual disposition that only the indwelling Spirit is able to provide. Hence, a virtuous delight of complacence is ultimately also a spiritual delight that is grounded in the fountain of true virtue, the love of benevolence to Being in general.

The aesthetically oriented paradigm inherent within the delight of complacence is not the only way Edwards views spiritual delight. After all, the complexities and dynamics of interpersonal relationships cannot be entirely reduced to aesthetic categories. Significantly, he also utilises an interpersonal paradigm to speak of a "delight of communion" where the

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<sup>531</sup> For a helpful discussion on the relationship between the two different forms of delight, see Cooley (1989), pp.487-490.

<sup>532</sup> "True Virtue," in WJE 8:546-548.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., p.548.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid., p.551.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid., pp.546-547.

emphasis is on the joy of interpersonal communication and fellowship.<sup>536</sup> We will return to this form of delight later in the chapter but, for now, we will simply highlight its presence in Edwards' writings.

In addition to the two aforementioned forms of spiritual delight, Edwards also often speaks of a third form of delight which he terms the delight of "compounded self-love". For him, "self-love is a man's desire of or delight in his own happiness" and could be further differentiated into a virtuous "compounded self-love" or an unvirtuous "simple self-love".<sup>537</sup> According to Edwards, simple self-love is essentially equivalent to a kind of self-centeredness where a person's private interests are placed at the center of one's pursuit of happiness, independent of the good of others. Compounded self-love, however, can become a truly virtuous kind of love. Love of this latter sort comprises of a compounded principle of simple self-love *and* a unitive principle which unites the subject to another such that the good of the other becomes one's own.<sup>538</sup> Consequently, the happiness which one delights in is not merely private and self-centered but one that is constituted by the good of another. In Edwards' thought, the infused spiritual disposition functions precisely as this unitive principle that binds the saints to God and allows for a virtuous delight of self-love.<sup>539</sup>

The three forms of spiritual delight mentioned above are not strictly speaking altogether distinct in kind from one another nor are they mutually exclusive. For Edwards, they are all derived from the fount of infused grace and hence are all considered spiritual delight of some sort.

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<sup>536</sup> "True Love," in WJE 10:640-641.

<sup>537</sup> WJE 18:74-76. Norman Fiering actually identifies four forms of self-love in Edwards' writings. In addition to the two noted here, he also makes a distinction between self-love as a morally neutral "universal psychological principle of seeking happiness" and self-love as a proper and healthy "limited self-regard". Fiering (1981), pp.159-160.

<sup>538</sup> WJE 18:74-76.

<sup>539</sup> The compatibility of self-love and benevolence as the root of true virtue has been convincingly argued for by David Brand in his work on the theme of self-love in Edwards' thought. Brand (1991).

## 6.4 The Unsatisfactory Aspects of Edwards' Spiritual Delight

Edwards' account of spiritual delight presents us with a fruitful model for understanding the complex relationships between sanctification, delight, virtue, Scriptural content and pneumatology. Moreover, it also goes some way towards explaining how a transformative understanding of divine goodness through the work of the Spirit and the understanding of Scripture could be achieved within the nexus of these relations. Nevertheless, his overall understanding of spiritual delight remains unsatisfactory in two significant aspects.

As mentioned earlier, according to Edwards, spiritual delight towards the excellency of God is formed by an "interaction of Word and Spirit".<sup>540</sup> However, this interaction is also one that is heavily biased towards the Spirit. Edwards maintains that the understanding of Scripture plays no causal role whatsoever in the formation of spiritual delight and merely provides the opportunity for the Spirit to causally generate such delight within the saints.<sup>541</sup> In the last two chapters we have examined the inadequacy of this relationship between Scripture and Spirit in Edwards' thinking and have instead argued for Scripture's integral role in the formation of spiritual perception and delight. The second unsatisfactory aspect of Edwards' understanding of spiritual delight pertains to his conception of delight as simple ideas. In chapter two, we have argued that such a position is problematic and should be rejected.<sup>542</sup>

For the next few sections, we hope to delve deeper into these two aspects of Edwards' account and consider how it could be revised and further refined in light of the contemporised

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<sup>540</sup> Stein (1977), p.109.

<sup>541</sup> WJE 18:85.

<sup>542</sup> See section 2.3

account of spiritual perception that we have been developing in the past few chapters. Let us then proceed by considering the first issue that was raised.

### 6.5 Scripture and Spiritual Delight

Having rejected Edwards' account of the relationship between Word and Spirit in the previous chapter, how then should the generation of spiritual delight through the Spirit's work and the understanding of Scripture's content to be conceived? To this, I suggest that our discussion in the past chapters provides us with an illuminating way of understanding their relationship that I think does justice to Edwards' concern to maintain the foundational necessity of Spirit infusion for spiritual perception and delight, but nevertheless does not reduce Scripture's content to mere notional signs as Edwards did.

It was proposed in chapter three that when Christ shares his Trinitarian-human unitive drive with us by the Spirit, he also thereby shares with us a certain good-seeing disposition or appreciative capacity for divine goodness. This unitive drive, I further propose, exerts an influence over our understanding and grasp of the content of Scripture – a content that is not limited to its illocutionary content, but stretches to include its affective, aesthetic, personal and literary content and vision.<sup>543</sup> In particular, the unitive drive instills within the reader of Scripture an appreciative capacity that shapes one's grasp of the overall content of Scripture and the understanding-experience one undergoes in coming to grasp that content. This is not unlike the way our human sex drive influences our understanding and experience of a romance novel. The enjoyment and appreciation of the characters, narrative, emotional force and overall experience of the novel is deeply dependent on the sexual drive and perception that readers bring into their reading experience. The inability to project and enter into a

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<sup>543</sup> The nature of Scripture's content was the focus of our discussion in chapters four and five.



sexual world is a severe handicap in grasping the literary point, excellence and overall content of a well written romance novel. In an analogous fashion, the unitive drive of Christ influences our grasp of Scripture by opening up new and deeper ways of appreciating God's goodness through Scripture's content and vision. Significantly, the phenomenological and psychological effect of the unitive drive infuses our experience of the content and vision of Scripture to bring about a deeper understanding-experience of God's goodness and purposes which the scriptural vision projects. To put it differently, one could also say that the affect of the unitive drive gets "taken up"<sup>544</sup>, to use Roberts' phrase, into one's understanding-experience of Scripture's content and vision and thereby infuses the whole experience with a distinctive affective tone or content. Therefore, the spiritual delight in God's goodness that results from it is also a kind of understanding-experience brought about by our experience of the content and vision of Scripture as it is being constituted by the affective effect of Christ's unitive drive.

In addition to generating this affective tone, the unitive drive also allows the reader of Scripture to better appreciate, grasp and make sense of the overall content of Scripture in the way that it is meant to be understood by her author. Without the unitive drive, much of Scripture's internal coherence, logic, personal significance and point simply cannot be adequately appreciated. It is akin to an attempt to understand a romance novel without the influence of a human sex drive and the unique sexual perception it affords. Such a reader is simply unable to enter into the kind of appreciation, understanding and experience of the novel that its author is inviting her to. This very same point has been argued by Edwards when he contends that the perception of God's moral beauty is a foundational requirement for grasping the overall beauty, coherence, logic, appropriateness and goodness of the salvation

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<sup>544</sup> Roberts (2003), p.145.

that Scripture proclaims.<sup>545</sup> Without it, the reader is blind to the “excellency of Scripture” and her wisdom.<sup>546</sup> Therefore, the Trinitarian-human unitive drive of Christ and the *sui generis* perception of divine goodness it provides the reader of Scripture also serves as a sort of illuminating light that enlightens the regenerate to a deeper and more adequate understanding of its content, resulting in the kind of spiritual understanding of Scripture Edwards had in mind. However, unlike his original theory, on this proposed account, the Scriptural content remains causally integral to the spiritual understanding-experience as it serves as the central organising structure of the supernatural delight, in the same way that a well written romance novel plays an integral role in bringing about a romantic delight towards the characters and situations depicted.

The integral role of Scriptural content does not therefore undermine the foundational necessity and importance of the Spirit’s contribution in the formation of spiritual delight via the interaction of Word and Spirit. On the contemporised account developed above, one important aspect of the Spirit’s work in the experience of spiritual delight is his work of infusing within the reader of Scripture the unitive drive of Christ and thus influencing her understanding-experience of Scripture with its accompanying affect.<sup>547</sup> However, crucial as this work of infusion is, it need not exhaust the work of the Spirit in the generation of spiritual delight and understanding. Significantly, it could also include his work of overcoming our aspect blindness to appropriately construal our life in terms of the Scriptural vision and the surfacing of various concerns as suggested in chapter two. The Spirit’s work of infusion and his work of aiding our construals are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they must work together to bring about spiritual understanding and delight, since on our account, spiritual delight is a kind of spirit-aided construal that incorporates the affect of the unitive

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<sup>545</sup> WJE 2:301-302.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, p.274.

<sup>547</sup> For further details on this work of infusion by the Spirit refer to our discussion in chapter three.

drive alongside other concerns and content. Last but not least, it is also important to recognize that Scripture as divine discourse is also the word of the Spirit. The Spirit, according to much of the Christian tradition, is in some sense the divine author who shapes and inspires the contents of Scripture and hence plays a foundational role in the very formation of the Scriptural work.<sup>548</sup> Therefore, because of the various crucial roles highlighted above, the Spirit remains the necessary active agent that works to bring about a deeper and more accurate spiritual understanding of Scripture through its Spirit-inspired content and vision.

Having addressed the relationship between Scripture and Spirit on the contemporised account of spiritual perception, there remains the second issue of the structure of spiritual delight. As we have seen, Edwards conceives of spiritual delight as a simple idea or quality. Yet, that conception is rather problematic as we have noted in chapter two and should be rejected. However, if spiritual delight is structurally complex, how can its complex structure be understood in a way that is illuminating for understanding the nature of spiritual transformation and the psychology of grace? In addressing this, Roberts' work once again provides some very relevant insights and could serve to develop the lacking aspects in Edwards' original account. Hence, in the next few sections we want to once again draw upon his account of the emotions to consider in greater detail the psychological structure of the three significant forms of spiritual delight found in Edwards and how it functions to bring about love for God and the capacity to overcome temptation and sin. In particular, we propose that this spiritual delight of infused grace can be fruitfully conceived in terms of Roberts' account of emotions rather than Edwards' own partially Lockean conception. However, it should be noted that in utilising Roberts' account of emotions to explicate the notion of spiritual delight, we are also moving beyond Edwards and towards a contemporised

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<sup>548</sup> For an overview of the history of the doctrine of biblical inspiration in the Christian tradition from the early Christian church to the modern era, see Farkasfalvy (2010).

or synthesised account. But before we get there, we would need to first address a limitation in Roberts' account of the emotions.

### 6.6 Robert's Account of Emotions Revisited

As previously mentioned in chapter two, Roberts takes the paradigm of emotions to be concern-based construals.<sup>549</sup> On his view, emotions are perceptions of a situation whereby one's concern is integrated into the construal. This integration of concern into the perception also accounts for the *affect* of the emotion, its characteristic “phenomenal and qualitative” feeling. For Roberts, the affect of an emotion is the “coloration” of value that is embedded within the emotional perception where that value is derived from the construed bearing that a situation has to the prior concerns of the subject that are integrated into the construal.<sup>550</sup>

While Roberts' analysis of emotions is rather illuminating for some cases of emotions such as fear, joy and anxiety, it does run into limitations when applied to others. Simply put, his paradigm of emotions is unable to account for the discovery of new values, through one's emotional experiences, that are independent of whatever prior concerns a person may have. Yet, it seems difficult to deny that we do in fact discover novel values through our emotions with aesthetic emotions being a prominent class of such. The emotion of being struck by the beauty of a sunrise or the sublimity of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony does not seem to be an affective feeling that is generated from a prior concern one already has. A person may have never cared for or had an interest in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony but nevertheless come to discover its value through an experience of the aesthetic emotion or emotional feeling for the very first time. In such cases, one's concern for the Ninth Symphony is not a pre-existing prior concern that the subject brings to the emotional experience. Rather, it is a result of

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<sup>549</sup> See section 2.4

<sup>550</sup> Roberts (2011a).

discovering its value through that experience. Such aesthetic emotions seem rather commonplace and there are no good reasons why they should not be considered an emotion other than to accommodate Roberts' paradigm. Hence, Roberts' account cannot be said to be explanatory of emotions whereby one comes to identify the object of concern independent of any prior concerns one may have.

There is a sense, however, in which Roberts' account can be said to accommodate a discovery of value and the formation of new concerns through the emotions. Roberts allows for concerns to be vaguely conscious or even unconscious to the subject.<sup>551</sup> Hence, it is possible for a person to possess a concern that she is unaware of having. In such a case, the subject's emotional feelings may signal to her the existence of her unconscious concerns, thereby surfacing them to consciousness and allowing the individual to discover the value that the objects of those unconscious concerns in fact have for her. Nevertheless, this sense of "discovery" remains quite distinct from the discovery of novel values one never had to begin with, either in the form of conscious or unconscious concerns. Thus, the difficulty remains.

To be fair, Roberts did acknowledge a limitation with his paradigm of emotions that is closely related to our criticism. He admits that there is a class of emotions that escapes his paradigm which he calls "identifying construals".<sup>552</sup> Unlike concern-based construals, which are construals that impinge upon a prior concern, identifying construals are construals whereby one comes to identify the object of concern. Nevertheless, even then, simply to provide a label for a class of emotions and acknowledge it as non-paradigmatic is hardly illuminating or satisfying. One could still legitimately ask how the object is identified as a concern in the identifying construal and what its relation to concern-based construals is. Moreover, are we to think that there are no meaningful conceptual connections and

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<sup>551</sup> Roberts (2003), p.320.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., p.289.

similarities between concern-based construals and identifying construals in virtue of which they can be both considered an emotion? These are all important issues that Roberts has yet to address, and until then his account of emotions remains too limited for many theorists including Edwards. Spiritual delight, in Edwards' writings, is often akin to what we have termed an aesthetic emotion. It is an affective experience through which one comes to discover and experience the supreme beauty and goodness of divine holiness, in virtue of which one comes to love and be concerned for God and his glory. It is without doubt, a discovery of a new supreme value for the subject that is independent of any concerns one might previously have. Hence, as it stands, Roberts' account of emotions cannot do the demanded explanatory work that takes us into a deeper understanding of a broadly Edwardsean spiritual delight.<sup>553</sup>

#### 6.6.1 Expanding Roberts' account of Emotions

Despite the aforementioned problems, I think Roberts' account of emotions can be further developed to overcome its limitations and be fruitfully applied to better understand the nature and structure of spiritual delight. However, before that could be done we would first have to understand why his account of emotions does not mesh well with Edwards' notion of spiritual delight to begin with.

It is important to recognize that Edwards' conception of the affections is not exactly equivalent to Roberts' notion of emotions. Affections, for Edwards, are inclinations of the will that cover a wide range of affective states that include what Roberts considers to be the paradigmatic emotions (such as joy, fear and anger), but it also stretches to encompass other

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<sup>553</sup> Roberts' account is sufficient for the kind of natural delight in prevenient or converting grace as we have outlined in chapter two. Such a delight is based upon one's prior concern for one's happiness and fullness of life. However, the same account would be insufficient for an Edwardsean spiritual delight.

affective states such as pleasure and pain sensations, enjoyments, aversions, appetites, desires and cravings. Especially significant for our discussion is Edwards' frequent use of the category of "appetites" when talking about the religious affections.<sup>554</sup> An appetite, according to Edwards, is a certain capacity for enjoyment.<sup>555</sup> Thus, our appetite for food or sex can be thought of as a capacity to enjoy the qualities of food and sexual activity respectively. Many of our appetites are simply a part of our human nature designed by God. They can be considered primitive or basic in the sense that we are simply given these appetites at birth quite apart from our involvement. Nevertheless, primitive appetites can be augmented in various ways within limits. Thus Edwards also spoke of the ways in which one could increase, deepen and promote our spiritual appetites for God, even though all Christians in virtue of the Holy Spirit's regenerating work already have some basic or primitive capacity to enjoy Him.<sup>556</sup> The same point can be made about our natural primitive appetites like the appetite for food, which can be developed or combined with other appetites in various ways to become more sophisticated capacities for enjoyment through training, conditioning, deeper understanding and experience.<sup>557</sup>

Despite the significance of the category of appetites in Edwards' understanding of religious affections, it is almost completely absent in Roberts' account of the emotions. In Roberts' analysis, there are two fundamental conceptual categories that constitute an emotion: concerns and construals. Yet, an appetite or enjoyment is neither of these. Hence, his account runs into some degree of limitation when analysing emotions that has enjoyment as an

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<sup>554</sup> See, for instance, his sermons "Spiritual Appetites Need No Bounds", "Youth and the Pleasures of Piety" and "Born Again". The significance of the category of "appetites" in his thinking on infused divine love as an affection has also been noted by Paula Cooley. She remarks that "Edwards's theological genius lies in his refusal to restrict love, human or divine, to goodwill and the appreciation of goodwill alone. Instead, for Edwards divine love itself has an additional appetitive energy in both its creative and redemptive exertions." Cooley (1989), p.490. Edwards (2004), pp.223-235. "Youth and the Pleasures of Piety," in WJE 19:84. "Born Again," in WJE 17:194.

<sup>555</sup> See for example WJE 18:533.

<sup>556</sup> Edwards (2004), pp.234-235.

<sup>557</sup> This point is argued by John Deigh in Deigh (2008), p.93.

integral constituent, such as the aesthetic emotions. It is also for this very reason that Edwards' aesthetically oriented holy affections does not mesh well with Roberts' paradigm of emotions as concern-based construals.

How then are enjoyments constitutive of emotions that reveal to us novel values? To begin addressing this, we would first have to broaden the notion of emotions beyond that of concern-based construals. In this regard, the work of Bennett Helm is particularly helpful, mainly because his analysis of emotions comes very close to Roberts own account and offers several insights that could serve to complement what is lacking in Roberts' view. Helm argues that emotions are felt evaluations.<sup>558</sup> According to him, emotions "are feelings of positive or negative import, where such feelings are modes of caring about something as a proper focus of one's concern."<sup>559</sup> Hence, an emotion or felt evaluation is a feeling of how the situation is going, positively or negatively, with respect to the things we care about, things that have import to us. Such a feeling is evaluative in nature because there is a kind of evaluation of the positive or negative bearing the situation has to our concerns that is embedded within the felt affective phenomenology.<sup>560</sup> Therefore, Helm believes, the feeling of the affective phenomenology of an emotion is the feeling of its impression of import.<sup>561</sup> It is a feeling of a situation or object's appearance of goodness or badness as it bears on the things that are of importance to us.

Helm's view of the emotions is not far from Roberts'. The crucial difference being that by taking emotions to be felt evaluations, Helm has made the feeling of the relevant affective phenomenology by the subject to be essential to an emotion. Roberts, on the other hand, takes the structure of an emotion as concern-based construal to be essential and the

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<sup>558</sup> Helm (2001), pp.27-122.

<sup>559</sup> Helm (2002), p.19.

<sup>560</sup> Helm (2001), p.34.

<sup>561</sup> Helm (2002), p.19.



awareness or feeling of the emotion to be quite optional. Nevertheless, for cases where emotions that are felt, Helm's understanding of emotional feeling is quite consistent with Roberts' overall view of emotions. Emotional feelings are a subject's felt impression of import regarding a situation or object.

Broadly following the lead of Roberts' and Helm's work, I suggest that emotions can be conceived as a kind of impression of value. However, unlike other kinds of value impressions that could be merely intellectual in nature, emotions are affective impressions with a distinctive affective phenomenology formed by an evaluative construal shaped by one's concerns.<sup>562</sup> There is here an important distinction between *concern-based* construals and what I shall term as *concern-shaped* construals, the latter being a broader category that encompasses the former. In a concern-based construal, the perceived value or import of a situation is derived solely from the construal and the prior concerns that are embedded within the construal. On this explanatory model, the emotional construal can have its impression of import or value only because a concern is integrated into the construal which then provides the perception its element of import. In a concern-shaped construal, however, the perceived import of a situation need not be established solely upon one's construal and prior concerns. Its element of import or value may be jointly derived from the integration of prior concerns *and* other affective phenomena, such as enjoyments and dis-enjoyments, into one's construal to form the overall import component of the perception. Hence, the value or import giving constituent in the emotional perceptions of this latter sort could be said to be a kind of construal that is *shaped* by prior concerns but is not necessarily *based* solely upon them.

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<sup>562</sup> I make a distinction between the affective phenomenology and the conscious awareness or feeling of the phenomenology. Like Roberts, I take that the subject of the emotion need not be consciously aware of the emotion's affective phenomenology nor do I insist that the affective phenomenology must be consciously felt by the subject.

Roberts' account of emotions as concern-based construals is certainly one way in which our concerns can shape our construal and thereby create an affective impression of value. However, there are also other ways in which our concerns can shape our construal to form an affective impression of value. In some cases, concerns shape our construals not via the construals impinging on some prior concerns, but through our prior concerns providing an evaluative orientation for our affective experiences, such as our affective experiences of enjoyment or dis-enjoyment. Let us unpack this point further.

Enjoyments or dis-enjoyments are affective states but they are not necessarily emotional, at least not in the sense of Helm's and Roberts' account. For example, the enjoyment of baked bread may be an affective feeling in that it is a feeling related to one's affective state of enjoyment and its accompanying motivation. However, it is not thereby also an emotional feeling since the feeling need not be a feeling of its impression of import (its goodness or badness). One may place little importance on enjoying baked bread and thus not have any positive or negative concern of sufficient depth to manifest itself as an emotional feeling or affective impression of value. Nevertheless, the affective phenomena of enjoyment could be taken up into a broader evaluative framework and thus acquire an impression of import that is experienced as an emotion. Hence, the enjoyment of baked bread when embedded within a larger context of an understanding of the Eucharist and its import may acquire an emotional dimension for the Christian. Here, the enjoyment takes on a meaning, significance or import that alters the affective phenomenology of the experience and transforms it into an affective impression of its import.<sup>563</sup> To phrase differently, it could also be said that one's experience of the enjoyable experience is informed by some evaluative orientation, concept or understanding so as to communicate to the subject how the enjoyment

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<sup>563</sup> A similar point has been argued by John Deigh. He contends that our initial experiences often require further interpretation regarding its bearing on our good or ill in order to arrive at its value for us. Similarly, in our example, the initial experience of enjoyment is further interpreted in light of the understanding of the Eucharist to establish for us the overall value of the situation. Deigh (2008), p.87.

should be taken with respect to one's understanding of what is important (its goodness or badness). This evaluative orientation is not merely intellectual in that it is not simply an orientation formed by our judgments, concepts or beliefs on what is important but is also significantly shaped by our concerns. Concerns carry evaluative weight and embody values for a person in ways that are distinct from judgments, evaluative concepts or beliefs. One could judge or believe that something is important without it actually being important for the subject. The latter requires an appropriate concern for the purported object of import that mere beliefs and judgments of importance do not. Hence, concerns play a crucial role in embodying what actually is important to us and shape the evaluative orientation for understanding and interpreting our affective experiences in very significant ways.

For emotions that are significantly constituted by an enjoyment, the evaluative understanding or construal need not presuppose that the object of enjoyment is an actual or prior concern to us. Nonetheless, as mentioned, it does provide some evaluative orientation for that object with regards to our existing concerns. For instance, I might begin with a deep concern for my health and some understanding or construal of Salmon as a health promoting food. That concern featuring understanding together with my enjoyment of the taste of Salmon could, under the right circumstances, bring about an affective impression of the goodness of Salmon which in turn gives rise to a new found concern for that food. This novel concern for Salmon need not be a pre-existing concern prior to my enjoyment of the taste of Salmon. There might be a wide range of health promoting foods which I do not care for even though I am aware of them. Thus, the mere concern for my health does not entail that I am also concerned for Salmon. Rather, it is the enjoyment of Salmon together with the evaluative orientation or understanding of Salmon as a health promoting food that jointly identifies it as a new object of concern through a kind of affective impression of its goodness. Hence, the subsequent concern for Salmon possesses a certain independence from the prior concern for

health. Nonetheless the latter does provide a context for how the enjoyment of Salmon should be interpreted or understood evaluatively, thus contributing to the affective phenomenology of the enjoyment and allowing the enjoyment to be experienced as an emotion (i.e., an affective impression of import).

When enjoyments are taken up into evaluative construals shaped by concerns it becomes an affective impression of import or emotion. Such emotions, unlike Roberts' concern-based construals, could reveal to us novel values and bring about new objects of concern. For convenience, we shall term emotions that take such a structure to be *appetitive emotions*. The appetitive emotions are conceptually related to Roberts' concern-based construals. Significantly, they are both emotions in virtue of being an affective impression of value formed by an evaluative construal shaped by one's concerns (with concern-based construals being one way in which an evaluative construal is shaped by one's concern). Moreover, the appetitive emotions also provide an important conceptual link, missing in Roberts' work, between his suggestion of emotions as concern-based construals and as identifying construals. On our account, identifying construals such as certain instances of the emotions of love and attachment simply are species of the appetitive emotions and hence share in their characteristic structure.<sup>564</sup> They are the experience of an object's goodness or badness (its import) as the enjoyment or dis-enjoyment of the objects' essential and enduring qualities are taken up into an evaluative construal shaped by one's concerns. Thus, in this way, we preserve the core of Roberts' insightful account of emotions as concern-based construals but yet were able to broaden it to include other classes of emotions that escape his core paradigm in a principled manner, particularly emotions through which we come to

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<sup>564</sup> Roberts lists the emotions of attachment and love as taking the structure of an identifying construal rather than a concern-based construal. He also admits that these emotions deviate from his key paradigm of emotions as concern-based construals. Roberts (2003), pp.288-289.

discover novel values and form new concerns. With this further theoretical development, we are now ready to return to the issue of spiritual delight as an emotion.

## 6.7 The Structure of Spiritual Delight

### 6.7.1 Spiritual Delight of Complacence as an Emotion

In chapter two, it was proposed that on the contemporised account, it is possible to understand the natural delight of self-love as a Robertsean emotion: a concern-based construal of God in terms of the gospel that impinges upon a person's concern for her own righteousness and fullness of life. A similar proposal can be made for understanding the structure of the spiritual delight of compounded self-love with the difference being that the personal concern is now constituted by an intrinsic concern for God. In other words, the spiritual delight of compounded self-love can be conceived as a gospel construal of God that impinges upon one's concern for her own happiness where the happiness in question is centrally constituted by an enjoyment or appreciation of divine holiness.<sup>565</sup>

The transition from the natural delight of self-love to its spiritual and truly virtuous counterpart is bridged by the delight of complacence. According to Edwards, what allows self-love to be virtuous is the love of complacence, by which one comes to locate his happiness in beholding the beauty of God.<sup>566</sup> It is therefore the delight of complacence that provides the required experiential quality for natural self-love to blossom into a spiritual and virtuous compounded self-love.

How is the delight of complacence to be understood on the contemporised account and how is it structurally related to the delight of self-love? In light of our expansion of

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<sup>565</sup> The discussion on Edwards' notion of compounded self-love can be found in section 6.3

<sup>566</sup> WJE 18:75-76.

Robert's account of emotions, I propose that the delight of complacency can also be understood as a kind of emotion. However, unlike the delight of self-love, the delight of complacency is not a concern-based construal. Specifically, it is an emotion that takes the structure of the appetitive emotions. In other words, it is not a construal of God that impinges upon a prior concern, but a construal that discovers the import or value of God and thereby identifies him as the object of concern. Delight of this sort is analogous to the joy a mother feels after giving birth and beholds her child for the first time. The mother's joy is not based on a prior concern she has, but simply on perceiving the child as a momentous good. In terms of Roberts' analysis, it is not a concern-based construal but an "identifying-construal": "a construal that identifies the object of concern".<sup>567</sup>

In a manner similar to the mother's joy, when the Holy Spirit indwells believers and shares with them Christ's unitive drive and good-seeing disposition towards God, they come to delight in God simply for who he is. The cause of this delight is twofold. First, the Holy Spirit aids them in overcoming their aspect blindness and allows believers to construe God in terms of the gospel through the content and vision of his divine address to them. In this Spirit-aided construal of God, they come to see him in terms of his essential and enduring nature as the Scripture invites them to. Second, the unitive drive that Christ shares with the church instils within believers a new "appetite" or capacity for the enjoyment of God, allowing them to take delight in his essential nature and see him as a tremendous good. This is again analogous to mothers developing a biological instinct during pregnancy to take joy in their new-born and see them as a momentous good or the development of a human sex drive during puberty which instils in one a new appetite or capacity for the aesthetic enjoyment of the opposite gender's sexual beauty. Similarly, believers who share in Christ's Trinitarian-human unitive drive are infused with his inhering disposition to enjoy and find delight in

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<sup>567</sup> Roberts (2003), p.288.

God's essential nature and subsequently construe him as a momentous good for them. In that moment of construal, their enjoyment of God is taken up into an evaluative construal shaped by concerns to form an affective impression of import that is equivalent to an appetitive emotion of delight towards God. Hence, in this two-folded manner, the delight of complacency as an emotion is thus formed within the believer through the infused unitive drive and the Spirit-aided construal of God's goodness via the content and vision of Scripture.

It is possible that the spiritual delight of complacency develops gradually within a person. One's construal of God via Scripture's content could occur in differing degrees of clarity, stability, appropriateness and vividness. It might begin as a dim perception of divine goodness and grows in lucidity over time. Moreover, Christ's unitive drive and good-seeing disposition may also dawn gradually in a believer, beginning as a weak, fragile and isolated tendency that has to be nurtured in various ways. Just as a dawning sex drive can gradually introduce a new good-seeing disposition towards the opposite gender and an urge to be with them in varying degrees of strength, the sharing of Christ's unitive drive could also be a slow gradual process that varies in strength. Nevertheless, this Trinitarian-human unitive drive is constantly at work within believers and undergirds the entire process of sanctification.

Although it may begin as a weak tendency, it could, however, gradually and eventually grow to dominate a person. Therefore, through the delight of complacency, the unitive drive thus serves as a powerful source of motivation to pursue God in the same way that our human sex drive eventually comes to dominate the lives of mature human adults and compels them towards marriage and union with members of the opposite gender.

### 6.7.2 Spiritual Delight of Communion as an Emotion

The above attempt to contemporise the spiritual delight of complacency has thus far been quite consistent with Edwards' own aesthetic emphasis regarding spiritual perception. As mentioned, Edwards sees the key characteristic of spiritual perception as the delightful sense of God's moral beauty in the spiritual understanding of Scripture, and we have been able to capture that aesthetic dimension in our contemporary formulation of the spiritual delight of complacency as a kind of appetitive emotion. However, is this aesthetic paradigm of spiritual delight sufficient to characterise the kind of delight required to bring about sanctification, love and obedience to God? In particular, one could legitimately question if the aesthetic paradigm is adequate in capturing the saint's spiritual delight in God as it pertains to the interpersonal dimension of her relationship with him. After all, relating to a person is quite unlike relating to a piece of aesthetic artefact. An aesthetically pleasing person might not be a delight to live and get along with.

With regards to the above question, it is important to note that the aesthetically oriented delight of complacency is not the only way Edwards view spiritual delight. Significantly, he also utilises an interpersonal paradigm to speak of a *delight of communion* where the emphasis is on the joy of interpersonal communication and fellowship.<sup>568</sup> Hence, in his early sermon on "True Love to God", he states that

A true lover of God experiences the pleasures of communion with God. This is the highest kind of pleasure that can possibly be enjoyed by a creature... for what can be more delightful than to converse with the excellent and glorious Creator of all things, to express love to and mutually to receive expressions of love from, the great Jehovah? But those that love God experience such pleasures as these.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> "True Love," in WJE 10:640-641.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.



In this sermon and elsewhere, in addition to the usual aesthetically oriented paradigm, there is also the interpersonal paradigm that is being stressed by Edwards.<sup>570</sup> For him, the aesthetic and interpersonal aspects of spiritual delight need not be mutually exclusive and are in fact quite compatible with one another in his thought.<sup>571</sup> Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity, it is still possible to maintain some conceptual distinction between the two paradigms.

Specifically, one of the crucial differences is that the enjoyment of interpersonal communion need not be identical or reduced to an aesthetic kind of enjoyment.<sup>572</sup> The aesthetic properties may not be the most relevant or the only qualities that are involved in one's enjoyment of a healthy interpersonal interaction.

If there is a spiritual delight of communion that is distinct from its aesthetic counterpart, how then should its structure and nature be understood on the contemporised account? As with the previous two forms of spiritual delight (complacency and self-love), I propose that the interpersonal delight of communion can also be fruitfully understood in terms of Roberts' account of emotions and the conceptual categories developed in our foregoing discussion. In particular, I suggest that the sharing of Christ's unitive with believers also gives rise to the delight of communion which is just as vital to the formation of a person's attitude of love towards God as the delight of complacency. As mentioned in chapter three, for Edwards, love is not merely a desire for the well-being of the beloved but also a longing to be united in a common form of life with the one loved.<sup>573</sup> The two desires here are distinct and although the delight of complacency serves to bring about a basic concern for God through a new found appreciation of his beauty, it does not in itself provide

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<sup>570</sup> See also WJE 2:201.

<sup>571</sup> This is especially prominent in his conception of "societal beauty" which we will touch on later in section 6.8.

<sup>572</sup> In my view, Edwards would support this point as well since he takes the categories of love and communion to be more basic than beauty, therefore communion cannot be reduced to beauty. However, there are other scholars that differ in their reading of Edwards and take the aesthetic categories to be more basic in his thought. A more detailed discussion of this issue can be found in section 6.8.

<sup>573</sup> "'Controversies' Notebook: True Virtue," in WJE 21:326. See also section 3.3.4 of this dissertation.

the motivation to share a common form of life with him.<sup>574</sup> The cultivation of this latter aspect of love for God is accomplished through a kind of delight of communion which is made possible only through God's union with believers in Christ by the Spirit. Let us consider how this is so.

According to Edwards' characterisation, the delight of communion is a delight that arises from one's personal interactions with God. Conceptually, this differs from the delight of complacency in that the latter does not require the sort of emotional and personal interaction that the former does. A mother may experience the delight of complacency towards her child in an identifying construal but yet find little pleasure in actually spending time and interacting with her as a person, perhaps due to poor interpersonal and communicative skills. The spiritual delight of communion thus depends upon a healthy personal relationship with God in a way the delight of complacency does not. One can come to be concerned about another for her inherent goodness without ever having a personal relationship with her and hence miss an important interpersonal aspect of taking delight in that person. But how is this healthy personal relationship with God to be understood?

Roberts, in his paper on emotions and personal relationships, has argued that a positive personal relationship is significantly constituted by a mutual concern for what the other person cares about and being mutually aware that the other has such a concern.<sup>575</sup> These concerns, moreover, are concretely embodied in a person's psychological life through their emotions, understood as a relevant construal that is based upon a concern for the other person or what she cares about. In this sense, emotions are the "major constituents of personal relationships"<sup>576</sup>. Hence, for instance, for two parties to have a healthy personal friendship

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<sup>574</sup> To have a basic concern for object A is to be concerned for A for its own sake and not merely as a means to some other concern, such as one's own happiness.

<sup>575</sup> Roberts (2009), pp.281-288.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., p.287.

would at least be for both sides to construe each other in a way they want to be construed, appropriate to the nature of friendship, and have the construal be based upon some concern for the other person and what he or she cares about. Such a construal might involve seeing each other as peers who are trustworthy and loyal companions. Without such concern-based construals, the relationship would not be a personal friendship.

In addition to the above, in positive friendships we are also often engaged in personal interactions with our friends that we enjoy and look forward to, and an important aspect of these interactions is emotional in nature. According to Roberts, for one individual to interact with another emotionally is to at least be aware of the emotions of the other and the concerns those emotions embody. This awareness could then be a factor in one's emotional response towards the other, which in turn leads to the formation of other emotions in the other party, creating a kind of interactive feedback in each other's emotional and psychological life.<sup>577</sup> It is important that this symbiotic relationship, where individuals interact and feed off the emotions of each other, is not merely intellectual in nature. Two individuals could feed off the knowledge and beliefs of each other without thereby constituting a personal friendship. For example, two academics that have no positive or negative concerns for one another or the things each cares about, but nevertheless feed off the ideas and knowledge of one another through an academic journal, would not constitute a personal friendship. This is because, for Roberts, the nature of personal friendships requires that we have an appropriate concern for each other and what the other cares about. Interactions that are merely at the level of beliefs and knowledge do not embody nor do they communicate those concerns but emotions do.<sup>578</sup>

Roberts' analysis of personal relationships and their connection with emotions provides an illuminating framework for understanding our personal relationship with God. To

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid., p.286.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., pp.286-287.

begin with, it explains why our relationship with God cannot remain at a merely intellectual level if we were to develop a positive personal relationship with him. Without a mutual interaction of our concerns with God's concerns that goes beyond mere religious beliefs, ideas or judgments, the relationship can hardly be counted as personal.<sup>579</sup> Beyond that, Roberts' analysis can also be extended to account for the kind of emotional delight often present in healthy personal interactions among friends, which may potentially be illuminating for understanding the kind of delight found in our personal interactions with God. In a healthy friendship, not only do we emotionally interact with our friends but we often enjoy and take delight in such interactions. As social creatures created in the image of God, we naturally have a longing to love and be loved for our own sake. One important reason why we often find delight in our emotional interactions with our friends is precisely because we perceive that they love us and are concerned about the things we care about. Hence, it is characteristic of genuine friendships that we rejoice at the successes of our friends and are saddened by their failures. Our joy and sadness are concrete psychological embodiments of our love and concern for them. We take joy in their success because we are concerned for their happiness and desire for them to flourish. Moreover, our friends are also delighted by being aware that we find joy in their success. They take delight in our joy for them which in turn causes us to be delighted at their delight. This mutual interaction and feeding of love and concern for the other in the form of concrete emotions thus generates a kind of joy and delight which accounts for much of the pleasure we experience in our interpersonal interactions with our intimate friends.

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<sup>579</sup> In an earlier publication, Roberts has also noted that emotions are vital to our personal relationship with God because they are "aspects of friendship with God" which embodies the fitting kind of attitudes and feelings we have towards him. Roberts (1992), p.45.

### 6.7.2.1 The Delight of Communion with God

In addition to the joy of human friendships, Roberts' analysis can also be fruitfully applied to the kind of spiritual delight present in one's personal relationship with God. Delight of the sort experienced in a positive personal divine-human relationship is what Edwards calls the delight or pleasure of communion. For Edwards, the delight of communion is a *sui generis* kind of experience that shares many similarities with the delight of ordinary friendships but also ultimately transcends it.<sup>580</sup> If that is the case, how then should the difference between the two kinds of delight be understood? One fruitful way forward is to think of this difference as being analogous to the distinction between the joy of platonic friendship and the joy of romantic love. The delight of romantic love shares many similar features with the delight of friendship. Most notably, they both involve a joy that arises from a basic concern for each other. However, there are significant differences as well. Romantic delight involves a further appreciation of the manner in which the other is good that exceeds that of friendship. When I establish a deep friendship, even with someone of the opposite gender, there might be many things that I appreciate about that person. However, I do not appreciate her as my potential lover, someone with whom I desire to establish an intimate marital union. This further appreciation colours and shapes every aspect of our emotional interactions in a romantic relationship which in turn gives rise to a different kind of delight from that of ordinary friendships. Similarly, the delight of communion with God can be thought of as a delight that although includes the delight of friendship, also exceeds it. Significantly, it involves a further appreciation of God as someone with whom we long to experience a level of union that surpasses any other kind. This appreciation colours our emotional interaction with him and generates the delight of communion which transcends that of ordinary friendship.

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<sup>580</sup> WJE 3:199.

The ‘further appreciation’ for God is made possible only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the hearts of believers. When the Spirit indwells our hearts, he shares with us Christ’s unitive drive and good-seeing disposition towards God. This Trinitarian-human drive adds a whole new dimension to our appreciation of God in the same way that the introduction of a sex drive adds a whole new horizon to our admiration of members of the opposite gender. We now have a new found appreciation for the manner in which God is good that is previously not possible due to the absence of this unitive drive. The sharing of Christ’s unitive drive with us thus alters and colours every aspect of our emotional interaction with God and, through it, we experience a joy that goes beyond the delight of friendship and towards the delight of communion.

It is important to note that on the account developed here, the unitive drive in itself does not produce the delight of communion. Rather, it merely colours and shapes the nature of our emotional interactions with God in a way that makes the delight of communion possible. The introduction of the unitive drive alone does not make it the case that we would have a harmonious relationship with God, just as a sex drive does not entail a harmonious marriage. Such delight further requires the labour of learning to form the appropriate concerns and construals about God and discern his emotional reaction towards us. In short, we would still have to learn how to please God and be in fellowship with him, even if it is the case that we now have a new found capacity to enjoy him through the infused Trinitarian-human unitive drive.

#### 6.7.2.2 Scripture and Emotional Interaction

Having described the nature of the delight of communion, we now want to consider the important role that the content and vision of Scripture plays in the emotional interaction

that constitutes such delight; thereby once again highlighting the intimate relationship between spiritual delight and Scripture. The Christian Scripture is one of the important mediums by which God communicates to us his concern towards his people. It is often in the reading and understanding of Scripture that we become aware of his concerns towards us and the embodiment of those concerns in the form of divine emotions and emotional dispositions.<sup>581</sup> This awareness of God's concerns and emotions through our understanding of Scripture's content can occur in a few ways, the most obvious being that Scripture depicts for us the concerns or emotions of God which we take to be directed or applicable to us in some sense. In addition to depicting the concerns of God, Scripture could also function as God's medium of contemporary divine discourse by which he communicates to us his current love and concern for us. For instance, when a believer reads the epistle to the Ephesians, he may be encouraged not merely by what the human author might be saying to encourage his readers or even the divinely inspired glorious truth of redemptive love depicted and proclaimed in the letter. Over and above all that, he could also be encouraged by the fact that God is *now* speaking to his current life situation and encouraging him through this particular epistle in Scripture. The emotional interaction here is not via the awareness of whatever divine emotions that are being depicted by the Scriptural passage or even the illocutionary act of the human author, but through the divine contemporary illocutionary act of God addressing one's current specific life situation by way of that particular Scriptural passage. This contemporary illocutionary act of God communicates the current concerns and emotions of

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<sup>581</sup> One need not suppose that God literally has emotions in the same way we do, but merely that he is portrayed as such and that we take it to be an appropriate description of God's attitude towards us. William Alston has defended an account for understanding the anthropomorphic language of Scripture along these lines. Alston (1989a).

God toward us via Scripture and may generate certain emotions within her readers upon being aware of them.<sup>582</sup>

Lastly, emotional interaction through the medium of Scripture could also occur when we attempt to discern the current emotional reaction of God towards us in our present situation through the lens of Scripture. For example, in our act of disobedience towards God's command, we may discern that he is grieved by our actions. This discernment is often partly constituted by what we understand to be the personality of God and the kind of relationship he has with us as revealed by God through Scripture. In this way, through an appropriate understanding of God via the understanding of Scripture we acquire a capacity to appropriately discern God's emotional response towards us in various situations of our life. Furthermore, a healthy emotional interaction with God also requires that we develop a capacity to appropriately construe and care about God in ways that are desirable to him. In this regard, Scripture as divine discourse also functions as a crucial means by which we discover God's instructions for us to construe and care for him, hence providing a pivotal foundation for learning to emotionally interact with him in a healthy and enjoyable way.

### 6.7.3 Contemporising the Three Forms of Spiritual Delight

Summing up the key points of our attempt to contemporise spiritual delight thus far, it could be said that the infusion of the Holy Spirit within believers, understood primarily as the sharing of Christ's personal unitive drive, brings about two distinct forms of delight which in turn give rise to two distinct aspects of love within the believer's heart. Through the delight

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<sup>582</sup> This is an often neglected point even by scholars who are eager to highlight the intimate relationship between Scripture and emotions. For instance, Roberts (2007) and Wynn (2005) are both keen to draw attention to the fact that religious emotions are often structured by their religious tradition and Scripture. However, what was not mentioned is that they are also significantly structured by the apparent awareness of God's contemporary illocutionary acts via Scripture towards her readers.



of complacency, believers come to perceive God as a tremendous good and be concerned for him for his own sake. Through the delight of communion, they come to acquire a motivational impetus for communion with the Triune God in a common form of life. These two forms of delight work together to generate the two aspects of love for God that Edwards identified – desire for union and desire for his welfare.<sup>583</sup> In short, on the proposed contemporised account, the believers' supernatural (or spiritual) love for God originates with the Holy Spirit's infusion of Christ's unitive drive in their conative system and his work of overcoming their aspect blindness. This dual aspect of the Spirit's work makes possible the dual delight of complacency and communion and results in a robust love for God.

The three forms of delight covered over the course of our discussion are not meant to be exhaustive categories of our joyous experience of God but simply the main psychological contours in our experience of transforming grace, nor are they meant to be mutually exclusive. The different forms of delight often co-exist together; mutually reinforcing, supporting and interacting with one another in complex ways to bring about the love for God. For instance, in our worship of God, we may perceive God as our greatest good and experience the delight of self-love. This delight may exist side by side with the delight of complacency as we simply identify God as a momentous good, independent of our concern for our own happiness. These two delights may subsequently give rise to the delight of communion as we discern God's pleasure towards us in our delight for him. The delight of communion could then further reinforce our perception that God is our greatest good, forming a sort of virtuous cycle of joy in God.

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<sup>583</sup> Refer to the earlier discussion in section 3.3.4

## 6.8 Communal Aspects of Spiritual Delight

The attempt to contemporise Edwards' doctrine of spiritual delight in its three forms has been rather individualistic thus far, focusing on the individual's delight in God. However, there is an important communal dimension to spiritual delight that should not be marginalised. It was mentioned earlier that the emotions of another could be a factor in my emotional response towards that person, creating a kind of emotional feedback that feeds off the emotions of one another. Such emotional feedback is also applicable to the church's communal delight in God where the spiritual delight of fellow believers becomes a term in my own emotional construal of spiritual delight in God, which may in turn serve as a term for the spiritual delight of others. This communal aspect of spiritual delight enhances the joy and enjoyment one experiences towards God, in the same way that watching a movie together with a friend enhances the enjoyment of the film than if we were to watch it by ourselves.<sup>584</sup> The joy of fellow believers functions as a term in our emotional construal of God and alters the affective phenomenology of our spiritual delight in him to allow for a deeper and more communal experience of delight.

Apart from the above, there is another important sense in which spiritual delight is communal in nature that has been highlighted by Edwards' own thinking on beauty. The core of Edwards' theological aesthetic is the Trinitarian beauty of God. For him, God is the only being that is properly beautiful and his beauty serves as the "foundation and fountain of all being and beauty"<sup>585</sup>. All other things or beings are beautiful only in a secondary sense that is derived from the primary beauty of God. Moreover, this foundational divine beauty is also deeply societal in nature. According to Edwards, beauty is fundamentally a kind of consent,

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<sup>584</sup> Alston makes the same point, claiming that the reason why it is much more satisfying to share an experience together with someone else is because each of the subjects "actually experiences, to some extent, the reactions of the other". Alston (1989), p.247.

<sup>585</sup> "True Virtue," in WJE 8:551, 564.

harmony or agreement.<sup>586</sup> “The more the consent is, and the more extensive, the greater is the excellency”<sup>587</sup>, and the greatest kind of consent is love between intelligent beings which manifests itself in union.<sup>588</sup> When this conception of beauty is applied to God, Edwards argues that “if God is excellent, there must be a plurality in God; otherwise there can be no consent in him.”<sup>589</sup> Hence, the beauty of God necessarily takes a communal form of love expressed in Trinitarian union.<sup>590</sup>

There are differing views in the secondary literature as to whether love is more fundamental than beauty for Edwards. On one end, there is Roland Delattre who takes beauty to be a basic category in Edwards’ thought.<sup>591</sup> On the other, scholars like Amy Plantinga and Norman Fiering view love and consent as a more fundamental category from which the category of beauty is derived.<sup>592</sup> On this issue, I side with the latter mainly due to the overall shape of Edwards’ Trinitarian theology which makes the beauty of God dependent on the Holy Spirit as loving consent within the Godhead.<sup>593</sup> He argues that God is properly and supremely beautiful because he is the ultimate expression of consenting love between intelligent beings.<sup>594</sup> This intra-Trinitarian beauty is manifested in the person of the Holy Spirit who is divine love and therefore the fullness and beauty of the Trinity.<sup>595</sup> Understood in this way, the church is also beautiful by extension as she is filled with God’s Triune love and

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<sup>586</sup> "Mind," in WJE 6:335-337.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid., p.336.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid., p.337.

<sup>589</sup> WJE 13:284.

<sup>590</sup> Louis Mitchell sums up Edwards’ Trinitarian aesthetics well by noting that for him, “all beauty is derived from and points to God, who in very being, specifically in the person of the Holy Spirit, is beauty” and “God’s glory is God’s excellency, beauty, and fullness within the triune society of the Godhead.” Mitchell (2007), p.39.

<sup>591</sup> Delattre (1968), pp.105-108.

<sup>592</sup> I am indebted to Amy Plantinga’s comparison between Delattre, Fiering and herself. Plantinga (2002), pp.82-83.

<sup>593</sup> See: "Mind," in WJE 6:365. WJE 13:384, 262-263.

<sup>594</sup> "Mind," in WJE 6:362-363.

<sup>595</sup> WJE 13:384. For Edwards, the Spirit is subjectively infused within believers to allow them to perceive and love the objective beauty of God expressed in the Holy Spirit as intra-Trinitarian consenting love and communicated to us through Christ. George Marsden sums up the core of Edwards’ theology of sanctification succinctly with the phrase “the love of beauty and the beauty of love”. Marsden (2010).

drawn into an affectionate union and consent to God, resulting in a society of harmonious beings reflecting the glory and primeval societal beauty of God.<sup>596</sup> Such a truly beautiful society is also a happy one since beauty and happiness are both grounded in loving consent.<sup>597</sup> As Gerald McDermott has noted, Edwards “maintained that all true happiness – even God’s – depends upon affectionate union in a society”; such a union is “a signal quality of both the beautiful and the good”.<sup>598</sup>

The societal or communal nature of true beauty is intimately related to Edwards’ thinking on spiritual delight and the ultimate eschatological joy of the saints. For him, the goal of creation is the joyous and affectionate knowledge of God’s glory communicated to all creation.<sup>599</sup> This final spiritual joy or delight is ultimately communal in nature and not merely isolated individuals contemplating the glory of God in holy affections. This important point is particularly highlighted in his sermon “The church’s marriage to her sons, and to her God”.<sup>600</sup> In the sermon, Edwards focuses on the final marriage of Christ and the church to flesh out the nature of the final joy that believers are to be a part of. He notes that there is a two-fold joy for the faithful minister and servant of Christ at the eschatological marriage of the lamb. On one level, he is an esteemed member of the blessed bride (i.e., the church) and hence partakes of the joy in her bridegroom as a dignified communal member of the church that is to be wedded to Christ.<sup>601</sup> On another level, he is also a loyal friend and servant of the bridegroom who shares in the joy of the bridegroom and rejoices in their union. In this capacity, he partakes “of the joy of the bridegroom in his rejoicing over his bride”<sup>602</sup> and delights in the

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<sup>596</sup> "An Humble Attempt," in WJE 5:339.

<sup>597</sup> Edwards makes the connection between happiness and love in “Treatise on Grace” and the connection between beauty and love in *Miscellanies* 293. “Treatise on Grace,” in WJE 21:187. WJE 13:384.

<sup>598</sup> McDermott (1992), p.66.

<sup>599</sup> “End of Creation,” in WJE 8:527-529. For an in-depth treatment of the evolution and development of Edwards’ thinking on God’s fundamental purpose for creation refer to Chapter 2 of Stephen Holmes’s “God of Glory, God of Grace”. Holmes (2000), pp.31-62.

<sup>600</sup> “The Church’s Marriage to Her Sons, and to Her God,” in WJE 25.

<sup>601</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*

beauty of the bride, not in relation to union with himself but with reference to union with Christ – his beloved friend and master.<sup>603</sup> Moreover, as servants of the bridegroom who have also played an instrumental role in “adorning” the bride and “winning her heart” to Christ, their participation in the joy of the consummation would be that much deeper due to their personal involvement in making this union a reality.<sup>604</sup>

Edwards’ description of the final joy of the saints as centered on the consummation of Christ and the Church, together with the different ways in which one is related to that eschatological union, highlights for us the important communal aspects of spiritual delight. Spiritual delight in its fullest sense is not merely an individualistic delight in the beauty of God, but a joy that has a deep communal structure to it on at least three levels. First, the situation or object that the believer’s ultimate delight is directed at is not simply God or God in relation to the believer as an individual, but the marital union of God with his church in Jesus Christ. When the friend of the bridegroom shares in the mutual joy of the bride and her bridegroom, he is not merely rejoicing in the bride or the bridegroom in isolation from one another. Rather, he is taking delight in the beauty of the two parties coming together in consenting, harmonious and glorious consummation. That is to say, the beauty in question is the beauty of the consummation and not merely the beauty of the individual party considered separately. Hence, the entirety of the object of spiritual delight is communal in nature; it is the beautiful society of the redeemed in sweet harmonious communion with the Triune God.

Second, this joy and delight in the eschatological union is also deeply structured and constituted by the personal attachments, concerns, involvements and relations one has with Christ and the communal church, not to mention the understanding of one’s instrumental role and labour in making this union possible. Third, the delight is comprised by the

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid., p.184.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid., p.191.

understanding, perception and identification of oneself as being an honoured communal member of the larger body of the church that is wedded to Christ. Believers are not wedded to Christ as individuals but as members of a communal body with its particular communal identity, history, narrative, triumphs and failures. Hence, even though one may not have played any significant role in shaping the church's identity, history or triumphs, nevertheless there is a kind of self-identification and perception of oneself as belonging to the community of the church which allows one to perceive the history, achievements and honour bestowed on the communal body as her own. Thus, the individual's spiritual delight in Christ as a member of the church is not individualistic and narrowly self-focused; rather, there is an expansion of the self in one's self-perception and identification such that she now perceives the honour, concerns and emotional interactions that are directed to the communal body as also being directed to herself, even if her overall contributions to the community is insignificant. Therefore, in light of the above considerations, one could conclude that the kind of emotional experience and perception of goodness involved in spiritual delight is not ultimately individualistic in nature but one that is irreducibly structured and constituted by communal elements.

#### 6.9 Overcoming Disobedience with the Grace of Spiritual Delight

Having provided an account for the nature and psychological structure of the different forms of spiritual delight and their relationship to a person's love for God and the operation of the Spirit within believers, we would now turn to consider its function in practical Christian living. As mentioned earlier, Edwards held that spiritual delight plays a crucial role in the process of sanctification. More precisely, he takes spiritual delight to be a delight by which a believer is sanctified and transformed. In the final section of this chapter, we want to

reflect upon this suggestion by Edwards and consider how exactly does the grace of spiritual delight aid a person to overcome the sin of disobedience.

#### 6.9.1 Edwards on Delight and Obedience

Spiritual delight, for Edwards, clearly plays an important role in overcoming sin. He thinks that one important reason why many people, including self-confessed Christians, continue to sin is that they find the pleasures of sin greater than the delight of obeying God. Edwards held that the commandments of God in themselves are not burdensome or difficult to fulfil, but are only experienced as such because of the absence of a spiritual appetite within the unregenerate, resulting in a natural aversion to spiritual things.<sup>605</sup> Hence, even if they believe that the law of God is ultimately good for them, they cannot obey it wholeheartedly. This line of analysis and reasoning regarding the psychology and phenomenology of disobedience is quite consistent in Edwards' corpus of writings. It is present in his early sermon on "True Love to God" and also in his later major works on "Original Sin" and "The Freedom of the Will" where he essentially attributes the "moral inability" of the unregenerate to choose and obey God to the absence of a fundamental kind of delight in the will.<sup>606</sup>

Edwards' solution to the problem of disobedience is one that is familiar to us by now: the infusion of the love of God within the soul. In "True Love to God", he argues that

The reason why they take the precepts of religion to be heavy and exceeding burdensome is because they find in themselves a great contrariety and aversion to it; [it] is directly contrary to their sin and corruption; but if ever the love of God, the contrary principle, is infused into their souls by the Spirit of God, their corruption will be mortified and the difficulty ceases with it.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>605</sup>"True Love," in WJE 10:636-637.

<sup>606</sup> WJE 3:381-383. WJE 1:196-198.

<sup>607</sup> "True Love," in WJE 10:641-642.

Edwards believes that the love for God that results from the infused love of God makes obedience to him “easy” because it is a delight to obey the one whom we sincerely love and most desire to please.<sup>608</sup> There is here a pleasure or delight that the regenerate experiences when they grasp that God, whom they love, is pleased in their act of obedience. This very pleasure is also what he later in the same sermon refers to as the “pleasures of communion with God”.<sup>609</sup> And it is such delight that removes the psychological burden of God’s commands, making them seemingly “easy and pleasant”.<sup>610</sup>

Edwards’ suggestion of the pleasure of pleasing God in our obedience can be considered a species of the delight of communion which we have been developing in this chapter. To be delighted at the awareness of God’s pleasure at our obedience is a kind of emotional interaction. It is the experience of joy as we discern God’s positive emotional response towards us. Moreover, his analysis of the psychology of disobedience also highlights for us the important relationship between the delight of communion and obedience that is worth considering in greater detail. For the remainder of the chapter, we would like to further explore and refine this relationship as suggested by Edwards and defend its feasibility. To aid us in that, it would be helpful to introduce some conceptual apparatus related to the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic desires as developed in the work of Robert Audi.

In his writings on practical rationality, Audi defines an intrinsic desire as a desire in which something “is wanted for some quality taken to be intrinsic to it”. This intrinsic quality is typically, in some broad sense, pleasurable or enjoyable in the agent’s experience of it.<sup>611</sup> However, this does not imply that in most cases of intrinsic desires, something is wanted

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<sup>608</sup> Ibid., p.637.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid., p.640.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., p.638.

<sup>611</sup> Audi (2001), p.82.



merely as an instrumental means to the further end of pleasure. Rather, the pleasure is in some sense *in* the desired object or activity and cannot be enjoyed apart from it.<sup>612</sup> Audi thus differentiates between a “constitutive means” and a mere “instrumental means”. The former is the sort of means present in intrinsic desires where the pleasure that motivates the action can be seen as being “in the activity itself” whereas the latter is a means in which the activity is quite contingent to the pleasure and could “in principle be replaced by a different means to it”.<sup>613</sup>

Applying the concept of intrinsic and instrumental desires in the context of Christian living, we could think of the difficulty of obedience to be somewhat like the situation experienced by Edwards’ unregenerate or “natural” man. Although he may very well judge it better to obey the law of God, he cannot bring himself to obey it because he finds his law burdensome.<sup>614</sup> Such a person may form a desire to obey God’s law because he believes it to be good for him and perceives its normative claim upon his life. He may even identify with such a desire in the sense that he wants this particular desire to prevail over his contrary ones. However, for the natural man, his desire for obedience to God is not an intrinsic desire. Rather, it is an instrumental desire where the act of obedience is not desired for its own sake but for a further end quite distinct from the act of obedience, such as doing the right thing, becoming a certain kind of person or even to be in harmonious fellowship with God. Moreover, because the agent could have such a non-intrinsic desire without actually having an *intrinsic* desire for obeying God and his law, he may very well find the act of obedience burdensome and take no pleasure or enjoyment in the act. In some cases, as a result, he may also lack the appropriate motivation to obey the law of God, even though he judges it to be a

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<sup>612</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid.

<sup>614</sup> "True Love," in WJE 10:637.

better course of action, and ends up performing the contrary act which he has a greater intrinsic desire for.<sup>615</sup>

The natural man finds it hard to desire God's law for its own sake because there is no supervening delight or joy in performing the act of obedience.<sup>616</sup> This can be likened to a man finding it impossible to have a desire to burn himself for its own sake because such a desire requires a desire for the sensation of being burned which he lacks, and this in turn is typically due to the lack of a supervening delight or pleasure in being burned. In the same way, to desire obedience to God for its own sake requires a delight that supervenes upon the act of obedience. But what kind of delight is this? As suggested by Edwards, it is a delight that comes from the joy of pleasing God. In other words, it is a delight of personal communion with him. Hence, the lack of an intrinsic desire to obey the law of God stems from the absence or feebleness of the delight of communion. Let us consider how this is so.

As noted by Audi, to desire something intrinsically is to desire it for its internal qualities that are typically in some sense pleasurable or enjoyable. For instance, to have an intrinsic desire to play tennis is to desire the pleasure or enjoyment that the activity of tennis playing affords, such as the satisfaction of putting in a good shot, the kinesthetic qualities involved and the physical invigoration that it brings. In the case of obedience, it is not the physiological features of the action that we enjoy or delight in but the overall meaning of the action for us. To love obedience and righteousness is first and foremost to love the source of and fulfilment of the moral order, God. The act of obedience towards God embodies the

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<sup>615</sup> Such cases would fall under the phenomena of *akrasia*, acting against one's better judgment. For a good discussion on the possibility of *akrasia*, see Mele (1987).

<sup>616</sup> The term 'supervenience' and its cognates are used here in the philosophical sense. The concept originates from discussions within moral philosophy and is used extensively in contemporary philosophy of mind. Brian McLaughlin and Karen Bennett define the concept in the following way: "A set of properties A supervenes upon another set B just in case no two things can differ with respect to A-properties without also differing with respect to their B-properties". With regards to our present discussion, the claim is that the emotional pleasure properties supervene upon the act of obedience and its associated psychological states (such as the relevant concerns, beliefs, and understanding). McLaughlin and Bennett (2011).

concern one has for him and in the act we come to experience the emotional satisfaction or delight of knowing God's pleasure *in* our obedience. This delight is generated by the mutual feeding of love and concern for each other in the form of emotions. In our obedience to God, we can experience joy in the act of obedience because we are aware of God taking delight in our obedience which in turn causes us to be delighted by his pleasure at our obedience. Our act of obedience and our awareness of God's joyous response in our obedience hence constitute a kind of emotional interaction that brings about the emotional delight of communion. In this sense, the delight of communion supervenes upon obedience, allowing us to experience the act as enjoyable and thus desire obedience towards God for its own sake rather than as a mere instrumental means to something else. This supervening delight of communion is also that which turns our obedience to God from "hard slavery" to "sweet delight" and grants us the psychological resources to overcome the challenge of disobedience.<sup>617</sup> Hence, the intrinsic desire for obedience is grounded in an intrinsic desire to enjoy communion with God, and *in* our act of obedience we come to experience the delight of communion that supervenes upon it.

The above point is not meant to suggest that obedience is merely an instrumental means to communion with God; rather, it should be thought of as a constitutive means to divine communion. Communion with the divine is partially constituted by our obedience towards him. It is not a good that is simply tacked on to the act of obedience, but the activity itself in consummation. In the terminology of Alasdair MacIntyre, communion is an internal, rather than an external, good of obedience.<sup>618</sup> The means has a natural intrinsic connection to the ends, whereas an external good has no such connection. On a related note, it is also important to recognize that there is a significant experiential distinction between obeying God as an instrumental means to enjoying communion with him and the enjoyment of communion

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<sup>617</sup> "True Love," in WJE 10:635.

<sup>618</sup> MacIntyre (1981), pp.27-34, 30.

with God *in* our obedience to him. In the latter cases, the action is experienced as enjoyable due to the emotional interactions that are experientially incorporated into the act itself. For the former, however, the delight of communion is not incorporated into the perception of the act of obedience and is therefore not experienced *in* the act. There remains an element of disconnect between the act of obedience and the experience of the emotional pleasure. Hence, the act itself is not experienced as enjoyable; rather, it is what the act subsequently brings about that is experienced as enjoyable and thus desired intrinsically. In the case of Edwardsean sanctification, the act of obedience is not only internally related to communion with God but the delight of communion is also integrated into the act such that the act is experienced as enjoyable and delightful. Only then, can the delight of communion provide the appropriate motivational resources to enable believers to relish and desire obedience intrinsically and not merely as a means to some other enjoyable experiences.

The preceding discussion should not be taken to imply that the delight of communion comes about instantaneously for the saints or without any serious effort on their part. The delight of communion, like any other enjoyment of personal relationships, has to be nurtured in various ways, and the strength of this delight is dependent on the health of our personal relationship with God. Therefore, overcoming the challenge of obedience in the process of sanctification is contingent upon our willingness to nurture the delight of communion and grow in our emotional interaction with God. Nevertheless, this contingency should not lead us to despair for our spiritual growth. We are able to be optimistic for our sanctification since we can rest secure in the knowledge that the entire process is undergirded by the life of God working within us through the indwelling Spirit and the sharing of Christ's Trinitarian-human unitive drive with us.

In summary, the challenge of disobedience in the Christian life is surmounted because the believer not only judges that obedience to God is his greatest good but also because he

actually has a strong intrinsic desire to obey him.<sup>619</sup> On the contemporised account, such an intrinsic desire can be had only through the delight of communion. This delight supervenes upon the act of obedience and allows believers to desire obedience not merely as a means to something else but also for its own sake. In this manner, the pleasure of obedience grows greater than the pleasure of sin and righteousness ceases to be “exceedingly difficult” and becomes even “easy and pleasant”.<sup>620</sup>

### 6.10 Summation

At this point let us consolidate our treatment of the theme of delight in transforming grace throughout the dissertation thus far. We began our discussion of spiritual delight with Edwards’ theory of spiritual perception. For him, the perception of God’s beauty and goodness in spiritual delight is formed by a complex interaction between the content of Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit. Another name for such perception is what he calls spiritual understanding. In the past chapters, I have attempted to further develop, contemporise and even at times correct Edwards’ conception of spiritual understanding with the aid of Roberts’ account of emotions, a renewed consideration of Scripture’s content and a revised notion of infusion. The aim of such an undertaking is to provide a constructive model to better understand the inner psychological process of an individual’s journey towards God that is broadly based on the Edwardsean idea of spiritual understanding and delight.

During the course of our discussion, we have uncovered three main forms of delight in the process of spiritual transformation: the delight of self-love, complacency and communion. The three forms of delight, as we have seen, are all significantly constituted by

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<sup>619</sup> As noted by Audi, an instrumental desire and an intrinsic desire could coexist together, such as a person desiring to play tennis for its monetary rewards and the enjoyable qualities of playing the game. Audi (2001), p.86.

<sup>620</sup> "True Love," in WJE 10:637.

the content and vision of Scripture and is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit within the human psyche to overcome our aspect blindness and, in the case of spiritual delight, infuse the Trinitarian-human drive of Christ within us.<sup>621</sup> Moreover, such delight is also constituted by the illocutionary content of Scripture and therefore carries with it the interpersonal agency and normative engagement of God that is inherent within the personal address of God to his people by way of Scripture. In this way, Scripture and Spirit thus work together to bring about a profound delight in the goodness of God that drives the transformation of believers.

The three forms of delight are not meant to be mutually exclusive nor are they independent of each other. In our pilgrimage towards God, we begin the journey of faith with a natural concern for our own happiness and come to delight in God because we perceive him as being able to satisfy our concern for righteousness and fullness of life. In this sense, the journey of faith begins with the natural delight of self-love. Such a delight is dependent on the Holy Spirit aiding us in overcoming our aspect blindness to construe God in terms of the gospel, based on our natural concern for our own dire situation as sinners fated for death and insignificance.

When we come to respond to God in faith and his Spirit indwells us, we begin to experience the spiritual delight of complacency as we share in Christ's Trinitarian-human unitive drive towards God. Through this experience we come to see God, perhaps gradually, as a momentous good and identify him as a basic concern relatively independent of our prior concerns. In this way, the delight of complacency functions as the means by which one comes to be concerned for God for his own sake and not merely instrumentally for our deliverance as sinners. This psychological process is similar to mothers forming a new basic concern for

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<sup>621</sup> Some instances of delight covered in our discussion (such as the natural delight of self-love in converting grace) would not involve infusion, whereas others (such as the spiritual delight of compounded self-love in sanctifying grace) would.

their child through the indescribable joy they experience in beholding their new-born, due perhaps partly to certain maternal instincts developed during pregnancy. At this stage, the delight of complacency need not replace the delight of self-love; they could very well exist together, mutually reinforcing each other.

Through the spiritual delight of complacency, we come to love God for his own sake and, in virtue of this basic concern for him, the basis for a personal relationship with God is formed. This personal relationship, if healthy, is constituted by a mutual feeding of love and concern for the other in the form of concrete emotions. When it is undergirded by Christ's unitive drive towards God through the Spirit, we form a new appreciation for God that colours our emotional interactions with him, generating the delight of communion in the process. Again, the delight of communion does not replace the other two forms of delight, but serves to strengthen our joy in God. In this way, our delight in God is multi-faceted in nature and a work of grace made possible only through the operation of the Holy Spirit within us to grant us the grace of emotional delight.

The three forms of delight work in tandem to overcome sin in our lives. In the delight of self-love, we are drawn to have faith in God's saving initiative and therefore overcome the sin of unbelief. The act of faith in God then allows for the Spirit of God to indwell our hearts and share with us Christ's unitive drive. This unitive drive gives rise to the delight of complacency where we become concerned for God for his own sake and therefore overcome the sin of failure to show proper concern for him. This concern and love for God makes it possible for us to establish a personal relationship with him and experience the delight of communion. The delight of communion supervenes over our act of obedience toward God and allows us to form an intrinsic desire to obey him, thus overcoming the sin of disobedience.

For believers who have faith in Jesus Christ, the process of sanctification is often gradual and slow since it takes time and effort to nurture the various forms of delight. Often, we can make choices and decisions that impede our growth, leading to a frustration in our experience of delight. Nevertheless, the people of God need not be overly anxious that their sanctification would end in failure, since this process of growth is constantly undergirded by Christ's own unitive drive towards God. Although this Trinitarian-human drive may start off weak, it grows in strength and eventually comes to dominate believers, just as our human sex drive comes to dominate us and propels us towards love, marriage and a whole new way of life. Hence, in this manner, the grace of spiritual delight is constantly working within the people of God through the Spirit in Christ to transform believers from sinners to saints worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



## **Chapter Seven: Christocentric Wisdom and Spiritual Perception of the Supreme Good**

### 7.1 Introduction

In the past six chapters we have sought to develop a contemporised account of Edwards' theory of spiritual perception, and at the heart of that account is an understanding of spiritual perception and delight in terms of Roberts' account of the emotions. Perhaps what is less explicit but nevertheless equally central to the contemporisation effort is the underlying assumption that the supreme goodness and value of God can be grasped and emotionally perceived rather unproblematically like any other good. This assumption, however, is quite questionable. Spiritual perception, according to Edwards, is not merely the perception of God's value and glory but a perception of his goodness as superior to every other rival good.<sup>622</sup> However, there are some good reasons to think that the divine good cannot be perceived as supreme in a straightforward manner. In this chapter, we want to reflect on three challenges that have been raised by various scholars that could potentially threaten the overall plausibility of the account that was developed in the past chapters. More precisely, the aim here is to consider these challenges to spiritual perception and examine if the understanding of spiritual perception as a kind of Robertsean emotional perception has the required conceptual resources to overcome the challenges presented and preserve the feasibility of taking spiritual perception to be a kind emotional perception of the supreme goodness of God. In light of these considerations, the contemporised theory of spiritual perception would also be further nuanced and refined to better account for the challenges raised. With this aim in mind, we shall begin by looking at three potential obstacles that could challenge the possibility of spiritual perception as developed in this dissertation.

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<sup>622</sup> "Pleasures of Piety," in WJE 19:84.

## 7.2 Three Potential Challenges to Spiritual Perception

The first challenge to spiritual perception pertains to the issue of human sinfulness and vice, and it arises from a feature implicit within Roberts' own account of the emotions. In chapter five, following Roberts, it was argued that many of our perceptual-like experiences are conditioned by our understanding. This, according to Roberts, is equally true for our perception of value. What we perceive to be good and worthy of pursuit is partly conditioned by our understanding and conception of human nature, reality, human flourishing and our place in the world. Differing conceptions and understandings on such issues result in very distinct perceptions, evaluations and appreciations of what is good.<sup>623</sup> Hence, a person who conceives of human nature and the world from a Christian perspective would likely perceive the character traits of Christian faith, hope and love to be highly admirable and good. On the other hand, an atheist who thinks of the world from an atheistic outlook would probably perceive the same character traits as vices to be detested. Moreover, because our perceptions of values are often of an emotional kind, such evaluations and perceptions frequently carry with it emotional and affective elements. Therefore, it is common that we not only judge certain traits or objects to be good or bad, but we also perceive them with a sense of admiration, adoration, revulsion or disgust.<sup>624</sup> In a similar way, Roberts notes that our perception of God is also partly conditioned by our understandings, concerns and beliefs regarding ourselves, human flourishing, reality and our place in the world. If these concerns and conceptions are fundamentally *sinful* in the sense of being anti-God, then it would be difficult to perceive God as the supreme good and appreciate him with the proper kind of admiration and adoration that genuine worship requires.

In addition to the above, the challenge of human sin and vice also has a closely related but distinct aspect from sinful understanding that can be broadly characterised as human vice

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<sup>623</sup> Roberts (2011), p.21.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., p.17.

and immaturity. The presence of vice and the lack of virtue in an individual can also lead to blindness towards divine goodness in a way that is distinct from sinful understanding. A professing Christian may conceive her life in Christian terms and sincerely believe in its truth but yet struggle to perceive in her heart the supreme goodness of God as above every other rival good. One probable reason for this is that the person has never developed the required discipline, concentration, habit, appreciation and virtue for sustaining a practice of fellowship and communion with God. Roberts and Wood, in developing their account of intellectual virtues, have emphasised the intimate relationship between virtues, practice and the epistemic goods afforded by the practice. They argue that most of our social practices are sustained by virtues which allow the practice to aim for and achieve the epistemic goods that are vital for her flourishing; the lack of which undermines the practice and her ability to produce those goods.<sup>625</sup> Similarly, to perceive the divine good may likewise require a communal and individual practice of a certain kind (such as the practices of meditation, prayer, discernment and self-evaluation) that can only be sustained by certain motivations, virtues and maturity of character. The presence of human vice and immaturity could result in the disruption and malfunction of these practices and therefore alienate us from the goods that they afford us, goods that are often required to perceive the supreme goodness of God.

Moving on, the second challenge to spiritual perception pertains to the hiddenness of the divine good in our present world. The problem of divine hiddenness comes in a few distinct forms and the sort that is most relevant to our discussion is what Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser identify as the existential problem.<sup>626</sup> It goes along the lines that even if God is supremely good and loving towards creation, for many, his goodness is simply not evident in their everyday experiences nor does it seem to involve a loving interpersonal

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<sup>625</sup> Roberts and Wood (2009), pp.113-120.

<sup>626</sup> Howard-Snyder and Moser (2002), pp.1-3. The other prominent form would be what Jonathan Kvanvig calls the “epistemic problem of divine hiddenness”, where hiddenness “presents a strong argument for atheism; in particular, that it yields an argument with the power to change the epistemic status of theism from counterbalanced to disconfirmed”. Kvanvig (2002), p.149.

relationship as far as they can tell. Regardless of what one may actually believe about God, he simply appears, from the point of view of many (Christians included), too hidden, distant and impersonal.<sup>627</sup> The existential problem of divine hiddenness could potentially serve as a source of blindness to the supreme goodness of God. Often, our experience of divine goodness is illusive and ambiguous compared to the goodness we encounter in other rival goods. Consequently, it is psychologically difficult to grasp the way in which God is supremely good for us. Indeed, for many, it is easy and perhaps even inescapable to feel removed from the person of God and become indifferent towards him due to the way in which his goodness is hidden from them – a stance that would be almost impossible to take towards their family and close friends.<sup>628</sup>

Lastly, the third challenge to perceiving the divine good stems from a metaphysical fact regarding the transcendent nature of divine goodness. Robert Adams in his work, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, remarks that God as the Good is “transcendent in the sense that it vastly surpasses all other good things, and all our conceptions of the good”.<sup>629</sup> This transcendence of the divine and infinite good, he argues, implies that unlike finite goods, the divine good does not fit neatly with our human conceptions of goodness. The divine good “exceeds our cognitive grasp in a positive direction” and therefore contains within itself an aspect of

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<sup>627</sup> The hiddenness of the supreme good is of course not alien to the Christian faith and could be found very early in the Christian tradition. Richard Bauckham, commenting on the Colossian Christ-hymn, notes that the hymn reveals a good purpose for creation by God that “is hidden because the event that establishes it looks for all the world like a triumph for the forces of violence and disorder that ravage creation. Hidden in the crucified and risen Christ is the secret of God’s purpose for all things that puts in true perspective all traces of his wisdom in the whole creation.” Bauckham (2004), pp.135-136.

<sup>628</sup> There is certainly a tension in the Christian faith between the demand for the worship of a transcendentally good God and the hiddenness of his goodness. Paul Tillich framed this tension eloquently in the following way: “The phrase “being ultimately concerned” points to a tension in human experience. On the one hand, it is impossible to be concerned about something which cannot be encountered concretely, be it in the realm of reality or in the realm of imagination. ... The more concrete a thing is, the more the possible concern about it. The completely concrete being, the individual person, is the object of the most radical concern – the concern of love. On the other hand, ultimate concern must transcend every preliminary finite and concrete concern. It must transcend the whole realm of finitude in order to be the answer to the question implied in finitude. But in transcending the finite, the religious concern loses the concreteness of a being-to-being relationship. It tends to become not only absolute but also abstract, provoking reactions from the concrete element. This is the inescapable inner tension in the idea of God”. Paul Tillich as quoted by Robert Merrihew Adams in Adams (1992), p.39.

<sup>629</sup> Adams (1999), p.50.

goodness that is alien to human goodness. “It is not merely an extension and refinement of familiar values”, but in some respect a goodness that far surpasses in quantity and quality any conception of goodness that finite created humanity is capable of grasping.<sup>630</sup> For Adams, one important consequence of the transcendence of the divine good is that “from the human point of view, the Holy has rough edges.”<sup>631</sup> That is to say, because the Good does not fit neatly with our best conception of goodness and is partly alien to human life and flourishing, it may in some instances be perceived from the human point of view to be unattractive, disturbing, fearsome or excessive. For example, the glory of the Lord appears for Isaiah to be terrifying (Isaiah chapter 6), and the goodness of God’s sovereignty as described by the apostle Paul (in Romans chapter 9) seems unreasonably harsh and disturbing. The transcendence of the divine good creates rough edges and will often offend even our best human conception and theologizing regarding the Good. The alienness of the divine good hence serves as a potential source of human blindness towards the supreme goodness of God. From our finite perspective, there are aspects of the divine good that we may find strangely alien and unintuitive to us and indeed struggle to appreciate the manner in which God is supremely good.

The three above challenges present a formidable obstacle for the possibility of perceiving the divine good as supremely good for us. Moreover, the three challenges are also deeply interconnected to one another. Scholars writing on divine hiddenness have often explained hiddenness as a consequence of divine transcendence or some form of human deficiency and sin.<sup>632</sup> Their inter-relatedness further allows for the possibility that the three challenges could mutually reinforce and give rise to one another to compound the problem

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<sup>630</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid., p.52.

<sup>632</sup> An example of the former would be M. Jamie Ferreira, while the latter would include Paul Moser’s argument from “cognitive idolatry” for divine hiddenness. It has also been noted by Robert McKim that most explanations for divine hiddenness can be basically classified as either appealing to divine transcendence, human defectiveness or the attainment of God’s purposes. Ferreira (2002). Moser (2008), pp.101-126. McKim (1990).

further. For instance, the hiddenness of the divine good in our everyday life may be in part due to the alienness of that good, which in turn give rise to our sinful conception that communion with God is incompatible with human flourishing. Alternatively, our sinful conception could also condition our perception of the divine good in such a way as to obscure the goodness of God from our value perception, thus further contributing to the hiddenness that comes from its transcendent nature. Hence, in these various ways, the three sources of blindness could work together to pose a redoubtable obstacle for perceiving God as supremely good.

The implications of these challenges for the overall theory of spiritual perception are enormous. If the challenges cannot somehow be surmounted then the very possibility of spiritual perception would be severely undermined. Therefore, it is imperative that any adequate account of spiritual perception must be able to provide some kind of response to these problems. With this in mind, the remainder of this chapter shall hence be given to considering how the contemporised theory of spiritual perception can overcome the challenges raised. Furthermore, because the contemporised theory is developed largely in terms of Roberts' account of emotions, much of the focus will also be on considering how the challenges can be accommodated within the broad framework of Roberts' work. To start us off, we shall begin by addressing the challenge of sinful human understanding and concern.

### 7.3 Sinful Understanding and Concern

The challenge of sinful human understanding and concern is one that is inherent within Roberts' account of emotional perception. On his view, emotional perceptions of value require the appropriate kind of concerns and understanding for its proper emotional perception. Understood in this way, it is then important to ask what kind of understanding and concern is required for spiritual perception and if spiritual perception as a kind of

Robertsean emotional perception is able to embody them for the perception of God's supreme goodness. To answer this question, it would be necessary to first uncover how Roberts' account of emotions is related to his own thinking on Christian wisdom and the emotional perception of divine value.

### 7.3.1 Roberts on Wisdom and Concern

The relationship between religious emotions, Christian wisdom and the perception of divine goodness in Roberts' thought is made most explicit in his essay on the epistemology of Paul the apostle where he undertakes a fascinating examination of Pauline epistemology from a broadly analytic epistemological perspective.<sup>633</sup> Central to his examination is the analysis of Pauline wisdom which he takes to be “a cognitive orientation by the compass of importance, an understanding of other knowledge that takes its bearings from an encompassing end”.<sup>634</sup> Roberts endorses such a conception of wisdom and with this characterisation he conceives wisdom to be a kind of understanding<sup>635</sup> about the importance and value of the various objects of knowledge informed by the grasp and understanding of the broad goal or aim of human life. This wisdom-understanding is also a perspective or orientation giving kind of understanding that grasps the connections between the object of knowledge and human flourishing. In this sense, wisdom is an “orientation-giving conception” regarding value, goodness and importance for the knowledge we encounter in the various spheres of human life.<sup>636</sup>

In addition to providing an orientation of importance, wisdom is also a power of discernment and judgment on the “bearing of possible courses of action on one's own wellbeing or that of one's community”. As we have seen in chapter five, understanding can

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<sup>633</sup> Roberts (2011).

<sup>634</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>635</sup> ‘Understanding’ in the sense covered in section 5.2.

<sup>636</sup> Roberts (2011), p.24.

manifest itself as ability. Hence, an understanding of the supreme good and the connections it has with the various possible courses of action in one's life can manifest itself as an ability or disposition "to distinguish well among the particular situations of life that bear, positively or negatively, on the end that wisdom presupposes".<sup>637</sup> Alternatively, it can also manifest as an ability to explain a situation's bearing on that end and therefore allowing some aspects of wisdom to be imparted to those who lack it.<sup>638</sup>

Wisdom, however, is not merely a purely cognitive understanding of the Good and its relationship with various dimensions of human life. For Roberts, it is also to rightly care about the Good and the human flourishing it brings about – to desire and aim at it, to discern it as important and worthy of one's utmost concern.<sup>639</sup> Hence, the kind of understanding embodied by wisdom is also an affective understanding where one grasps the connections between the Good and the affective dimension of one's life (especially its importance, value and goodness for us) such that one appreciates and cares about the Good and the goal of human life that is bound up with it. Therefore, Roberts maintains that wisdom is at its core a perspective-giving understanding of the Good and its bearing on various aspects of human life and knowledge that is "integrated with a lively concern for the end or ends" presupposed in the conception of goodness and human purpose.<sup>640</sup> This intrinsic concern for the Good and human flourishing makes wisdom not merely an embodiment of cognitive understanding but also of concern. As such, it is also the psychological grounds for various emotions.

Recall that Roberts takes emotions to be concern-based construals, with construals being a species of understanding. Thus, wisdom as a perspective-giving kind of understanding could also function as a form of construal that is based upon some concern for the ends and good presupposed by the conception of wisdom. It provides the person of

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<sup>637</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid., p.24.



wisdom a way of construing or “seeing” some particular circumstances in a way that impinges upon one’s concern for the Good, thus giving rise to various “wisdom-emotions”.<sup>641</sup> According to Roberts, these wisdom-emotions play a vital and unique epistemic role in the wise. Wisdom-emotions as emotions “are more than understandings, they are understandings with presentational content” and therefore are perceptual-like.<sup>642</sup> The person experiencing these emotions experiences a kind of impression or appearance of the object of emotion as it bears on his or her concerns. Seen in this way, wisdom-emotions are hence able to grant us epistemic acquaintance “with the value-qualities of things, and especially the qualities of their value *for us*”.<sup>643</sup> Such acquaintance is a distinct epistemic good from understanding or warranted beliefs and is available only to the wise who experience those wisdom-emotions. Therefore, via wisdom-emotions, wisdom can also function as an epistemic power or competency for epistemic acquaintance with the value of things or at least their appearance or impression of value for us.<sup>644</sup>

In the case of Christian wisdom, Roberts holds that it is primarily a kind of understanding “provided by central theological concepts and propositions” together with a deep concern for the ends assumed in our theological conceptions.<sup>645</sup> Such Christian wisdom also serves as the psychological basis for certain acquaintance knowledge via Christian wisdom-emotions. For instance, our theological conception of God’s love for us in Christ and the end he has secured for us in him could in some situations impinge upon our deep concern for that end and result in the emotions of joy and gratitude towards God. These emotions embody a kind of presentational or perceptual content that is distinct from merely having warranted beliefs or understanding of those theological conceptions. Moreover, the

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<sup>641</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>644</sup> This of course does not imply that our value-acquaintance will always be true in the same way that our visual perceptual acquaintance may sometimes fail to correspond with the genuine nature of the perceived object.

<sup>645</sup> Roberts (2011), p.24.

perceptual content in Christian wisdom-emotions is also evaluative in character. Emotions such as joy and disgust are evaluative in nature. They carry with them an element of valuing or devaluing the object of emotion. The reason for such evaluations in our emotions, according to Roberts, is due to their concern-based character. Our emotions are based upon some concern and we come to perceive the situation or object of our emotions in light of the manner in which they bear upon those concerns, negatively or positively.<sup>646</sup> Wisdom-emotions are no different in this regard except that the concerns pertain to what we conceive to be the supreme good and the purpose of human life. Conversely, the ‘wisdom of the world’ often reacts with disgust and anger towards the people of God since ‘worldly wisdom’ frequently conceives and cares about the purported Good and human purpose in ways that are incompatible with the Christian faith and is in this broad sense ‘sinful’ and in opposition to God. Christian wisdom, however, allows one to experience a different set of evaluative emotions towards God, the church and his commands. From this perspective, Christian wisdom therefore serves as the grounds of certain epistemic goods via the emotions, especially as it pertains to God’s value and goodness.

Roberts’ analysis of wisdom and its relation to our perception of goodness is rather insightful and could help us better understand the kind of understanding and concern that could aid or deter us from perceiving the divine good. However, there are also significant limitations to his analysis. Roberts’ work focuses mainly on the philosophical and epistemic dimensions of wisdom and generally makes little connections to the areas of Christology and Pneumatology which are traditionally held to play a crucial role in the perception of divine goodness.<sup>647</sup> Moreover, he is not specific on what the precise required content of Christian wisdom should be in order to allow for the possibility of spiritual perception. On these points,

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<sup>646</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>647</sup> Regarding the role of Christology and Pneumatology, Maarten Wisse notes the long tradition in Trinitarian theological epistemology that takes the following pattern: “The Son reveals the invisible and unknowable Father in and as the world, and the Spirit symbolizes the moment of recognition of this revelation of the Father in the Son through the faith of believers.” Wisse (2011), p.8.

Edwards' theology can serve to enrich Roberts' analysis, especially with regards to the place of Christology and Trinitarian theology in the conception of wisdom described by Roberts. Hence, it is to Edwards again that we shall now turn.

### 7.3.2 The Self-Glorification of God in Christ as the Ends of Creation

Scholars of Edwards have long noted the prominence of the theme of divine self-glorification in Edwards' theology and the centrality of this idea to his understanding of God's ultimate purpose for creation.<sup>648</sup> According to him, God's final end in creating the world is to display his own glory in such a way that his creatures are able to perceive, know and love his unsurpassed goodness. Steve Holmes, in his important study on the theme of glory in Edwards' theology, has noted that this divine act of self-glorification is also centered upon Christ and his work of redemption.<sup>649</sup> Edwards held that God's eternal aim in creation is to "procure one created child, one spouse and body of his Son for the adequate displays of his unspeakable and transcendent goodness and grace".<sup>650</sup> For Edwards, the church as the body or spouse of Christ is the participant and audience of God's self-glorification in Christ – a glory she perceives and shares in only through her union with Christ, her head and husband.<sup>651</sup> Therefore, in Edwards' thinking, the purpose of human life and indeed all of creation is explicitly Christological in nature.

The Christological end of creation is also inseparable from Christ's humiliation on the cross in Edwards' theology. In *Miscellanies* 762, Edwards takes the supralapsarian position that few are willing to and asserts that the crucifixion of Christ is the foundational divine

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<sup>648</sup> One of the most significant recent studies of this theme in Edwards' writings is Steve Holmes' *God of Grace and God of glory*. Holmes argues that the theme of divine glory can be taken to be one of the central organising strands of Edwards' theology. Holmes (2000), p.244.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid., pp.247-253.

<sup>650</sup> WJE 23:179.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid., pp.179-180.

decree for creation and is logically prior to all other decrees of God.<sup>652</sup> He argues that the crucifixion is “the cause of all the decrees, the greatest of all decreed events, and that on which all other decreed events depend on as their main foundation, being the main thing in that greatest work of God, the work of redemption, that [which] is the end of all other works”.<sup>653</sup> Hence, for Edwards, the end of creation is the glorification of God that is firmly and eternally centered on his humiliation and redemption on the cross in Christ. It is therefore also the communication of a particular evangelical kind of divine glory: the glory of God’s humble suffering love in Christ. Furthermore, this evangelical glorification is not merely the end or aim of creation in some contingent sense where Christ being the goal of creation through crucifixion is dependent upon Adam’s sin. From the above Miscellanies entry we can see that Edwards goes much further and affirms that in terms of logical sequence, God first wills to redeem the world through the crucifixion of his Son and only subsequently does he foreordain the sin of Adam so that the former may be fulfilled. Thus, Edwards held that the redemption of the world in Christ through his humiliation on the cross is the very foundational reason for God’s creation of the world and serves to explain everything else we observe in the universe including the existence of sin, rather than the other way round. This radical insistence on Edwards’ part just goes to show how deep the evangelical Christocentricity runs in his theology of creation and history.

For the above reasons, Holmes, in his analysis of Edwards’ doctrine of creation and history, was able to affirm that the gospel of Jesus Christ, for Edwards, is the “hermeneutical key” and center that enables one’s coherent understanding of the meaning and significance of the whole of human life, creation, Scripture and history. If we were to relate this Edwardsean

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<sup>652</sup> Melville Stewart observes that, historically, the majority mainstream Christian tradition has favoured infralapsarianism instead. In contemporary philosophical theology, Alvin Plantinga has provided one of the most sophisticated defences of supralapsarianism. He argues that it is in virtue of the incarnation and atonement that the actual world is among the best possible worlds, and is what motivates God to actualise it. His reasoning and conclusion is similar to Edwards’ own, as we shall see. Stewart (1986). Plantinga (2004), p.10.

<sup>653</sup> WJE 18:408.

theology of creation to Roberts' characterisation of Christian wisdom as a kind of perspective-giving affective understanding informed by the theological ends of human life, we could also add that the understanding involved in his conception of Christian wisdom must be constituted at its core by an understanding of Christ and his redemptive work on the cross. This is because, to echo Holmes, it is only in the person of Christ and his gospel that we come to grasp the "organising" center and "hermeneutical key" that allows us to rightly understand the proper Christological meaning and end of human life.<sup>654</sup> In this way, the perspective-giving understanding of the Good that we find in wisdom is also one that is thoroughly Christocentric in nature.<sup>655</sup>

### 7.3.3 Loving the Good in Christ

Wisdom, however, as we have seen in Roberts, is more than just understanding; it is also a concern for the good or end that wisdom presupposes. If so, how can one come to have an intrinsic love and concern for the Christological destiny of creation? On this point, Edwards' theory of spiritual perception is once again insightful. In our discussion of spiritual perception, it was mentioned that the proper object of such perception is the glory and beauty of God's divine love.<sup>656</sup> Although this is true, it is also somewhat imprecise. For Edwards, no human being other than Jesus Christ who "is in the bosom of the Father" can have an "immediate sight" or knowledge of God. All created beings only see God in a mediated way through Christ who functions as the "grand medium" of the knowledge of God to all creation,

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<sup>654</sup> Holmes (2000), pp.115-116.

<sup>655</sup> The conclusion here is also consistent with the New Testament's understanding of true wisdom. In his study of the theme of wisdom within the four gospels, Stephen Barton concluded that true wisdom as presented in the gospels "is a manifestation of the hidden life of God made known in the life, death and resurrection of the Son of God". Similarly, in his examination of Pauline wisdom, Richard Hays argues that Paul's understanding of true wisdom is centered upon the reality of Christ crucified. Barton (1999), p.109. Hays (1999), p.123.

<sup>656</sup> See section 6.3

including the knowledge of God's glory and beauty.<sup>657</sup> Hence, in Miscellanies entry 777, he explicitly affirms that Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible [God], by whom alone God is seen and known by the saints".<sup>658</sup> By this assertion, Edwards does not mean to deny any and all knowledge of God apart from Christ. He held that one could come to know of God's necessary "existence and perfections" through a priori reasoning, independent of knowledge of Christ. Moreover, he also believes that created things can and do image the glory of God to a certain extent and thus allow divine goodness to be seen in a limited way through them.<sup>659</sup> Rather, what Edwards meant to affirm is that the seeing or perception of God in his *supreme* glory cannot be had in any other way other than in Christ who is the perfect "image of the invisible God". He argues that although God manifests his perfections in many ways, the supreme and most significant display of his glory is in his work of redemption. This redemptive work is "the most glorious of all God's works" and is the very purpose of creation and every other work of God.<sup>660</sup> For Edwards, the redemptive or evangelical glory of God is the supreme manifestation of the love of God to humanity and the very heart and center of that glory which God decrees to be communicated to his people. It is the glory for which the world is created, the center of heaven's eternal worship and the final end of all of God's works in creation. And it is only in Christ that this supreme evangelical glory or love can be perceived and seen by human beings.

Edwards does not think that this mediated manner of perceiving God and his glory in Christ is in some way inferior to a direct or immediate perception of God. There are two main reasons for this that can be seen in his famous sermon, *The Excellency of Christ*. First, Edwards insists that the perception of the incarnate Christ and his goodness is the best and

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<sup>657</sup> WJE 18:428-429. Again, in Miscellanies 952, Edwards states that the Christ is God's "medium of communication" to creatures. In everything he does, he does it through Christ including the communication of his glory. WJE 20:221.

<sup>658</sup> WJE 18:430-431. The same point is made in his notes on Scripture. WJE 15:319.

<sup>659</sup> WJE 18:429, 431.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid., p.430.

most perfect way of seeing God's divine glory for created beings. In the sermon, he argues that the excellency of Christ consists in the "admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies" in Jesus and proceeds to identify three groups of conjunctions that can be found in Christ.<sup>661</sup> The first group consists of various pairings of excellencies that are seemingly opposites of each other but yet can be found conjoined in Christ, such as his "infinite highness and infinite condescension" and his "infinite justice and infinite grace".<sup>662</sup> These pairings of apparently diametrical excellencies are unlikely to be found in any one person but nevertheless can be seen harmoniously in Christ and hence serve to further enhance his beauty and goodness. The second group of conjunctions comprises of seemingly contradictory pairings that cannot be found in any other person but Christ. Whereas conjunctions of the first group are merely improbable but not necessarily contradictory were it to be possessed by any one person, the pairings of the second group, however, would in fact constitute a contradiction were it to be predicated of anyone else other than Christ. Edwards contends that the latter pairings of excellencies could only be conjoined in Christ and no one else, not even the other members of the Trinity, since it requires the possession of a human and divine nature that is unique to the incarnate Christ. Examples of such conjunctions, according to Edwards, include "infinite majesty and transcendent meekness" and "infinite glory and lowest humility". The last group of conjunctions pertains to the diverse excellencies of Christ that "are exercised in him towards men that otherwise would have seemed impossible to be exercised towards the same object". By this Edwards meant to highlight the conjunction of the excellencies of "justice, mercy and truth" which cannot be jointly directed at fallen humanity were it not for Christ; it is only in Christ and the atonement he brings that God can express to sinful humanity the excellencies of perfect justice, mercy and truth simultaneously.<sup>663</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> "The Excellency of Christ," in WJE 19:565.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid., pp.566-567.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid., p.572.

The conjunction of excellencies in Christ has an important role in Edwards' theory of spiritual perception. He reasons that the transcendent glory and beauty of divinity is too great for finite creaturely minds to comprehend and hence it is only through the glory that Christ manifests in his human excellencies that divine beauty is brought to a more suitable and appealing level for human minds to adequately appreciate and grasp. Moreover, although these human excellencies are not identical to Christ's divine excellencies, they nevertheless preserve "a semblance of the same divine beauty, and a savor of the same divine sweetness". Therefore, they image the transcendent primary beauty that is present in the divine intra-Trinitarian consenting love and present it in a way appropriate for human minds through the humanity of Christ.

The above point, however, does not imply that Edwards did not give the transcendent divine excellencies any significant role in spiritual perception. On the contrary, he held that the divine and human excellencies as they are conjoined in Christ serve to complement each other and significantly enhance Christ's overall glory than it otherwise would be when considered in isolation from one another. In making this claim, Edwards is careful to explain that he is not suggesting that the divine glory can somehow be objectively enhanced or made more glorious through the human excellencies of Christ. What he means is that the divine good, when perceived in conjunction with the human excellencies of Christ, is made to appear more glorious from the subjective finite human point of view.<sup>664</sup> In addition, he also insists that the three groups of conjoined excellencies are manifested in their supreme and most glorious extent in the crucifixion of Christ. Edwards argues that it is in Jesus' deepest suffering on the cross that the contrast between the divine and human excellencies is at its greatest. At the same time, however, it is also at their most extreme polarization on the cross that the seemingly divergent excellencies find their deepest concordance in Christ's suffering

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<sup>664</sup> Ibid., p.590.



love as they are uniquely harmonized together in him to form an unsurpassed display of his glorious soteriological love towards God and men.<sup>665</sup> Understood from this perspective, the evangelical glory of Christ, as it is constituted by the unique conjunction of diverse excellencies and manifested in his work of redemption on the cross, thus provides the most humanly perfect way of perceiving the glory of God and therefore also functions as the most appropriate object of spiritual perception for humanity.

The second reason why Edwards thinks that perceiving the glory of God in Christ is not an inferior way of perceiving God's goodness is because, in the words of Paul Ramsey, he believes that "we see God immediately in seeing the God-man and in participating in his union with the Father".<sup>666</sup> As noted by Robert Jenson, Edwards does not place any distance between the man Jesus and God, therefore to "close in" "with the human Jesus must in and of itself be closing with God".<sup>667</sup> In his *Notes on Scripture*, Edwards presents his reasoning for the seeing of God's glory in Christ and it is worth quoting it here:

We behold the glory of God as in the face of Jesus Christ, who is the brightness of God's light or glory, as it were reflected, and is the express image of the Father, the perfect image of God... And that is the only way that the glory of God is seen by his church; he is seen no other way, but in this perfect and as it were reflected image... And he that hath seen the Son, hath seen the Father [John 14:9]; and the Father is seen no other way, but by the Son. And 'tis only by this image is Christ seen in heaven by the saints and angels there. Yea, 'tis by this image only that God sees himself, for he sees himself in his own perfect substantial idea.<sup>668</sup>

Edwards here affirms that Christ is the perfect but "reflected" image of the Father and there is no other way for humanity to perceive the divine glory than through this perfect image.

Hence, to see the Son is indeed to have seen the Father. Elsewhere in his sermon on *The Excellency of Christ*, Edwards further comments on the relationship between Christ and the experience of the Father's glory. He asserts that the saint's enjoyment and joyous perception

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., p.579.

<sup>666</sup> Ramsey (1989b), p.738.

<sup>667</sup> Jenson (1988), p.119. See also Jenson's expansion on this point in his later work on Edwards' "eccentric" Christology. Jenson (2005), pp.72-83.

<sup>668</sup> WJE 15:319-320.

of the Father's goodness is in itself a partaking in the "Son's enjoyment of God". The church in being united with Christ "are in a sort partakers of his relation to the Father: they are not only sons of God by regeneration, but by a kind of communion in the Sonship of the eternal Son".<sup>669</sup> Hence, Edwards describes Christ as bridging the "infinite distance" between God and man through his incarnation to bring us into the bosom of the Father where he is, so that we may partake of the eternal enjoyment and communion of Sonship that Christ uniquely enjoys with the Father.<sup>670</sup> For Edwards, short of becoming the fourth member of the Godhead, this is as intimate and immediate a union, experience and perception of the Father's glory as creaturely beings can get. This intimate relation between Christ and spiritual perception was well captured by Paul Ramsey when he remarked that in the hands of Edwards the beatific vision tradition has been transformed into a thoroughly Christocentric vision where Christ is the heart and center of the saints perception of God's glory not only in the current life but also for all eternity in heaven.<sup>671</sup>

The Christocentricity of spiritual perception is closely connected to the formation of an intrinsic love and concern within believers for the Christological destiny of creation. For Edwards, the appropriate concern or love for the communication of God's glory is formed only via a Christocentric spiritual perception centered upon God's evangelical glory and love in Christ. The believer tastes for himself, via spiritual delight, the unsurpassed beauty of divine evangelical glory manifested in Christ and comes to be deeply concerned for its communication to all creation. Without a reconfiguration of the human perception of divine glory through the human excellencies of Christ, the glory of God remains too transcendent and intimidating for finite creatures to appreciate wholeheartedly. Understood in this way, the

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<sup>669</sup> "Excellency of Christ," in WJE 19:593.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid., pp.593-594.

<sup>671</sup> Ramsey (1989b), pp.722-723.

formation of an appropriate intrinsic love for the ends of creation therefore necessarily requires a Christocentric spiritual perception.

#### 7.3.4 Christocentric Wisdom

Our discussion of Edwards highlights for us one important point: the ends of creation can only be appropriately known and loved via an understanding of Christ. If we were to relate this fundamental point to our original discussion on Roberts' conception of Christian wisdom, then it must be insisted that true Christian wisdom is constituted at its core by an understanding and intrinsic concern for the Christological ends of creation. Thus, by integrating Edwards' Christological emphasis and our ongoing discussion on spiritual perception with Roberts' notion of wisdom, we have a conception of Christian wisdom that is thoroughly Christocentric in three significant regards. First, it is a perspective or orientation giving understanding informed by the all-encompassing Christological purpose of creation that is integrated with a proper intrinsic concern for that end. Second, the intrinsic concern for the Christological ends of creation is one that is formed by way of a Christocentric spiritual perception in which one experiences the various forms of spiritual delight that are centered upon God's evangelical glory and love in Christ. Third, building upon the contemporised account of spiritual perception in the past chapters, it can also be said that the formation of the aforementioned spiritual delight is Christocentric in the sense that it is formed by an interaction of the infusion of Christ's unitive drive by the Spirit and the content of Scripture which is centered upon God's redemption in Christ. The resulting notion of wisdom that emerges from the above three characterisations is what I shall simply term as Christocentric wisdom.

Taking Christian wisdom in the way suggested above, it is then easy to see how it could serve to overcome the problem of sinful understanding and concern that was raised earlier. Implicit in Christocentric wisdom is the proper perspective-giving understanding of the goal of human life and the intrinsic concern for that end to appropriately perceive God as the supreme good and appreciate him with the proper kind of emotions that true worship requires.<sup>672</sup> However, the issue of transcendence and hiddenness tends to complicate the solution we are putting forward here, especially as it relates to the formation of a proper concern for the destiny of creation. Even if one could form an intrinsic concern for God in Christ, it remains that it often fails to be one's ultimate or master concern. The issue is especially problematic given that the Good is both transcendent and hidden, posing a significant difficulty for one to perceive God as supremely good over every other rival good. These two challenges to spiritual perception will be the focus of our discussion in the next few sections and it is to the problem of hiddenness that we shall first attend to.

#### 7.4 The Hiddenness of the Supreme Good

The challenge of the existential problem of divine hiddenness stems from the observation that for many people, Christians included, high quality religious experiences of God's love and presence seems rare or altogether missing in one's everyday life. God appears, from the view point of many, too distant, impersonal and unresponsive to be experienced as a supreme good for us over every other rival good. This seems to be the case even for many devout Christians. To take a remarkable example, in the private letters of Mother Teresa we find a spiritual life that is predominantly marked by her painful experience of an

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<sup>672</sup> With regards to the relationship between emotional worship and Christology, Oliver Crisp in his analysis of Edwards' sermon on *The Excellency of Christ* has remarked that Christology for Edwards is an affective doctrine with an emotional appeal to draw people to perceive Christ's worthiness of love and commitment. Crisp (2012), pp.163-164.

unresponsive God who appears to be brutally cold and unloving towards one who is desperately seeking intimacy with her Lord.<sup>673</sup> The experience and enjoyment of the supreme good is hidden even from one who has devoted her entire life to the service of God. If the supreme good can be hidden in such a relentless and prolonged manner from someone as saintly as Mother Teresa, then presumably the phenomena could be rather widespread even among believers.

The experience of divine hiddenness poses a difficulty for spiritual perception. In particular, it seems to undermine the point that we can come to perceive and experience God as supremely good for us over every rival good, and in virtue of which come to a genuine devotion and worship of God. In light of this difficulty, the focus in this section is to reflect upon the challenge and consider how it could be overcome.

#### 7.4.1 Rea on Divine Silence

To lay the groundwork for the response, I would like to draw attention to a significant point made by Michael Rea in his treatment of divine hiddenness. Rea provides a different approach from most scholars writing on the subject and argues that the phenomenon of ‘divine hiddenness’ described by the literature is actually better captured by the notion of divine silence.<sup>674</sup> He observes that the idea of *hidden* implies that God “has been concealed (deliberately or not) to such a degree that those from whom it is hidden can’t reasonably be expected to find it”.<sup>675</sup> Whereas, the idea of *silence* in the sense suggested by Rea has no such implication and simply connotes that “God hasn’t made a special effort to ensure that most of his rational creatures detect (as such) whatever signs of his existence there might be or

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<sup>673</sup> Kolodiejchuk and Teresa (2007). Cited by Michael Rea in Rea (2011), p.267.

<sup>674</sup> Rea (2009), p.79.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid., p.80.

whatever messages he might be sending us.”<sup>676</sup> Hence, divine silence is a weaker claim than divine hiddenness and remains compatible with the possibility that God’s presence and goodness is not concealed from us. Moreover, divine silence in this context is also compatible with the possibility of divine discourse as discussed in chapter four. Silence here simply denotes the idea that God does not seem to be taking the effort to ensure most of humanity receive, hear or experience his personal love and concern for them. This remains consistent with him having spoken or expressed his love in history.

Having made the distinction between silence and hiddenness, Rea then proceeds to argue that the lack of high quality experiences of God’s goodness for most people does not entail that God is hidden from us but could equally suggest that he is merely silent in the sense described. Moreover, this silence is also compatible with God providing “some widely and readily accessible” means for us to experience his goodness in spite of the silence and thus does not necessarily constitute a form of concealment in itself.<sup>677</sup> According to Rea, divine silence need not amount to a lack of love and concern on God’s part for his creatures even if the silence does not ultimately benefit them in some way. The silence could simply be a part of the divine personality and that there may be something profoundly good for God, rather than for his creatures, to be silent in this way. More significantly, if divine silence were actually simply an expression of the divine personality, then it need not be indicative of any kind of unloving behaviour on God’s part. As noted by Rea, silence could be profoundly loving and communicative, as in the case of two lovers sharing in a moment of silence, and need not be interpreted as a lack of concern. In addition, he also argues that divine silence could only reasonably be construed as cold indifference if God has in fact not provided any accessible means for humanity to encounter his goodness and loving presence amid his silence. However, were he to do so, our insistence for God to break his silence could amount

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<sup>676</sup> Ibid.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid., p.81.

to a kind of immature demand for God to conform to our preferred manner of interaction rather than a respectful deference to his preference and personality.<sup>678</sup> Understood from such a perspective, the suffering that one experiences as a result of divine silence could often be a consequence of some form of immature and vice-like demand or expectation and therefore lays no moral obligation on God to cease his silence, especially if it is deeply beneficial for God to be silent in such a way.<sup>679</sup>

Divine silence is therefore not necessarily indicative of negligence if God has provided the means for humanity to encounter his loving presence and goodness that are reasonably accessible. But are such means actually available to us? Rea contends that they are and suggests that Scriptural narratives and the liturgies of the church could very well provide us with a mediated presence of God's love and goodness. Drawing upon the work of Eleonore Stump on second-person experiences and narratives that was touched on in chapter five, he argues that biblical narratives can provide us with "mediated experiences of God's goodness" via the second-person experiences that are embedded in them.<sup>680</sup> In addition to narratives, Rea also proposes that many of the liturgical practices of the church could also convey various experiences that mediate the divine presence. Following the lead of Wolterstorff, Rea conceives of a "liturgical action" as fundamentally a kind of "commemorative"<sup>681</sup> act which under the right conditions could "mediate the events" that it commemorates.<sup>682</sup> Commemorative acts accomplish this feat of "mediation" in a manner similar to the way in which narratives mediate the goodness of God, that is, by involving a kind of "seeing as" to perceive the circumstances, characters and events depicted by the

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<sup>678</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid., p.84.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid., pp.90-91. Refer to section 5.4.1 on how narratives can convey the personal knowledge of a person.

<sup>681</sup> Not all Christian traditions understand liturgical acts as merely commemorative. Nevertheless, many of the liturgies clearly have a commemorative aspect to it. Hence, Rea's point remains applicable to them.

<sup>682</sup> Rea (2009), p.90. Rea utilizes the work of Wolterstorff from: Wolterstorff (1991), pp.136-139.

narrative or commemorative act as one that puts us “in touch with historical events in which God himself was an actor”.<sup>683</sup> In this way, narratives and liturgical actions could function as an accessible means by which one arrives at a mediated experience of the goodness and loving presence of God even in the midst of his silence.

Rea’s proposal regarding the mediated experience of God’s goodness basically supports what we have been arguing for throughout the dissertation – that we can come to experience the goodness of God in a mediated way through a kind of “seeing as” or, to use the category developed in chapter five, a Scriptural vision of our relationship with God in terms of the content that the biblical narratives and liturgical acts convey. What we would add to his suggestion, however, is that this “seeing as” can be deepened beyond what is naturally possible only through the infusion of Christ’s unitive drive and the work of the Spirit in aiding one’s mental organisation of the various parts within the construal to form a coherent and appropriate whole (i.e., to overcome our aspect blindness). In addition, as noted by Rea, the experience of God’s goodness in this mediated way may very well be dependent on a certain ability that has to be trained and cultivated in various ways.<sup>684</sup> Many of us may not have the discipline, sensitivity, concentration and understanding to appropriately perform the kind of construal necessary to experience the divine good to begin with. Hence, it may require an element of learning and practice in order to construe the silence of God as loving presence and communion, perhaps even eventually coming to appreciate the profound goodness and communicative depth of his silence. To be sure, such an approach is certainly a different way of experiencing the goodness of another from what we are familiar with and requires the development of a different set of skills and virtues from those involved in our

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<sup>683</sup> Rea (2009), p.92.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid., pp.92-93.



typical human interactions. However, it may not necessarily be a lesser way to experience the goodness of another person, especially one that is infinitely beyond us.<sup>685</sup>

#### 7.4.2 Christocentric Wisdom and the Goodness of God's Silence

Drawing from Rea's work, we can conclude that divine silence, in the last analysis, does not pose a substantial problem for spiritual perception. Instead, it is precisely through the grace of spiritual perception that God provides for us an accessible means of encountering his goodness in a mediated way. Such experiences or perceptions may be initially difficult to achieve. However, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit together with proper training, practice and induction into an appropriate tradition of Christian spirituality, one could learn to perceive his or her situation as one of "living daily in the presence of a loving but silent God", perhaps even eventually coming to appreciate and enjoy his silence as supremely good.<sup>686</sup>

The points highlighted above also have an important bearing on the conception of Christocentric wisdom. Specifically, the kind of ability necessary for experiencing the supreme goodness of a silent God is also one that is psychologically grounded in Christocentric wisdom. The reason for this is that the construal by which we come to perceive the goodness and loving presence of the silent God must also be one that is structured by the perspective-giving understanding of human life and the intrinsic concern for human purpose which Christocentric wisdom provides. Without such a foundational orientation-giving understanding and concern, we would lack the crucial interpretative and axiological framework to inform us how the silence of God should be taken to mean. We would also lack

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<sup>685</sup> In a related way, Edwards, like many in the early church, do not see the accession of Christ as his absence, but rather as his fuller presence by the Spirit. He even claimed that "no saint that considers things aright will desire that [Christ] should leave heaven", since "Christ's reigning on earth by his Spirit is more glorious and happy for his church than his human presence would be". WJE 18:537.

<sup>686</sup> Rea (2009), p.93.

the basic concern to care enough for his loving presence to pursue it as a tremendous intrinsic good for us. Moreover, if our earlier discussion regarding Christ as the means by which one comes to appropriately perceive and appreciate the supreme evangelical glory of God is fundamentally right, then it follows that the experience of the silent God's supreme expression of love for humanity must also be Christocentric in nature. Christocentric wisdom thus provides the foundational unitive drive and understanding of Christ that allows the church to experience God's silent but supreme evangelical love for creation in mediated form through the Christocentric biblical narratives and liturgical acts.

In addition to its function mentioned above, Christocentric wisdom also serves as the overall organisational structure and motivational impetus for coordinating and deploying the various disparate skills and psychological resources that are involved in the act of experiencing God's silent goodness into a unified perceptual capacity. Christocentric wisdom is able to play this foundational organisational and motivational role because it contains within itself the fundamental understanding required for grasping God's loving presence (such as humanity's fundamental relationship with God, the locus and nature of his divine presence and love, and God's relation to the ultimate meaning of human life) and the intrinsic concern for that presence. This foundational understanding and motivation informs and coordinates the diverse skills that are employed in the appropriate act of "seeing-as" (such as the skills of self-management, concentration and attention) and organises them to form a functional ability for construing the goodness of a silent God. In other words, Christocentric wisdom serves as the foundational grounds for integrating the various disparate existing or to be acquired skills into a new Christocentric whole. Understood in this way, it is hence the foundational psychological grounds by which we can acquire the necessary virtues or skills to

overcome the challenge of divine silence and come to perceive and experience the silent God as supremely good for us.<sup>687</sup>

### 7.5 The Challenge of Divine Transcendence

Even if the problem of divine silence can be overcome via Christocentric wisdom, there remains another distinct problem for spiritual perception that pertains to the transcendence of the divine good. The challenge of divine transcendence, as mentioned in the opening section of the chapter, has to do with the alienness of the divine transcendent good from the finite human point of view. As argued by Robert Adams, if the divine infinite good vastly transcends our best human conception of goodness, it is then likely that we might be unable to appreciate the way in which it is good and perhaps even find divine goodness unattractive or disturbing from our limited point of view.<sup>688</sup> However, before we can begin to address the problem of alienness, there is another even more fundamental challenge associated with transcendence that we will have to first attend to and it pertains to the organic nature of intrinsic value perception. The problem of the organicity of intrinsic value is not one that Adams considers explicitly; nevertheless, it is a foundational issue that has wide ranging implications for spiritual perception and cannot be neglected. The two related but distinct challenges of alienness and organicity could potentially undermine any possibility of spiritual perception and would serve as the focus of our discussion in this section.

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<sup>687</sup> By following Rea in opting for the notion of divine silence over that of hiddenness I do not want to suggest that there is no room for divine hiddenness in the Christian life. God could surely choose to conceal his presence and love from us for a while if there is sufficiently good reasons for him to do so. Nevertheless, even then, the feelings of abandonment and alienation that results from divine hiddenness must never be allowed to have the final word in our experience of God, for God in Christ has authoritatively revealed himself to be one that is with and for his people. Therefore, whatever negative feelings that we do experience must always be understood within the more foundational understanding that he is irrevocably committed to us and with us in Christ. In other words, we must also apply Christocentric wisdom in the understanding of our feelings, situation and relationship with God in the midst of his hiddenness.

<sup>688</sup> See section 7.2.

### 7.5.1 The Problem of the Organicity of Intrinsic Value

In order to understand the challenge that the organicity of intrinsic value poses for spiritual perception, one would have to first begin with what it means for intrinsic value to be organic in nature. On the latter issue, Robert Audi's recent work on practical reason contains some of the clearest presentations on the subject and we shall borrow from his discussion to articulate the challenge. Audi takes the concrete conscious experiences of individuals to be the "bearers of intrinsic value" where such experiences are understood in an "internal" sense – meaning that they are internal to the subject's mind and "need not have an external object" of experience.<sup>689</sup> Thus, hallucinatory experiences could also have intrinsic value in the sense described. According to Audi, an experience comes to possess intrinsic value "in virtue of its internal, experiential qualities".<sup>690</sup> These experiential qualities need not be narrowly restricted to qualities of pleasure or pain but could include "non-hedonic" qualities that are considered good or bad from some particular axiological standard.<sup>691</sup> In addition to intrinsic value, Audi also introduces the notion of inherent value where something inherently good is taken to be "such that an appropriate experience of it is intrinsically good". Hence, a work of art, although not an experience, can nevertheless be inherently good.<sup>692</sup>

Audi goes on to nuance the notions of intrinsic and inherent value in considerable detail; however, for our purposes here, a brief sketch is sufficient. What is significant for us is the issue of the organic unity of intrinsic and inherent value that he highlights. Audi, following G.E. Moore's principle of organic unity, affirms Moore's point that "the value of a whole must not be assumed to be the same as the sum of the values of its parts".<sup>693</sup> To give an example, although the isolated aspects of a painting may each be beautiful and so inherently

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<sup>689</sup> Audi (2006), pp.82-83.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>691</sup> Audi (2001), pp.96-98.

<sup>692</sup> Audi (2006), p.85.

<sup>693</sup> Moore (1903), p.28. Cited by Audi (2006), p.80.

valuable in itself, when perceived in its entirety this may not be the case. One important implication of Moore's principle is that the inherent value of a thing can only be properly perceived when it is grasped in its whole in the same way that the proper aesthetic value of a painting can only be rightly perceived when one considers the whole of the painting and not merely its isolated parts or aspects. If we were to apply this principle to our discussion on spiritual perception, it follows that an adequate and proper perception of the transcendent inherent goodness of God requires a kind of perception that grasps the whole of God's inherent goodness and not merely an isolated aspect or part of the divine good. However, this sort of holistic understanding and grasp of an infinite good seems to be problematic on the contemporised account of spiritual perception; but before we can see how that is so, we would have to first touch on the nature of holistic perception and its relationship with emotional perception.

#### 7.5.1.1 Roberts on Holistic Perception

The perception of the whole is intimately related to Roberts' account of the emotions since, on his view, emotional perception is a kind of holistic perception.<sup>694</sup> Therefore, if the contemporised account of spiritual perception is to be plausible, it would have to show that his account of holistic emotional perception is able to accommodate the unique challenges that come with perceiving the inherent value of a transcendent good.

According to Roberts, holistic perception is a kind of organised perception where inherent within the perception is a certain organising structure that assigns various roles to the diverse parts that constitute the organised whole.<sup>695</sup> For instance, in the famous young-old woman gestalt figure, the explanation behind the two possible distinct perceptions lies in the

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<sup>694</sup> Roberts (2011a).

<sup>695</sup> Ibid.

fact that the same markings on the figure can be organised to resemble a young woman or an old woman. Moreover, within each distinct organisational structure, the same markings of the figure would also be assigned different roles.<sup>696</sup> Hence, the same pattern of markings that plays the role of ‘eyes’ in the young woman perception may also play the role of ‘hair’ in the old woman perception – the same parts are assigned different roles within each distinct organisational structure of the whole.

The perceptual whole is what the parts are *organised as* under the organisational structure of the perception. In the case of the *young woman* perception, the parts are organised in a certain way so as to form a whole resembling a drawing of a young woman. This whole is the certain something that the various parts of the figure are organised as when they are assigned their various roles.<sup>697</sup> Thus, certain markings in the drawing are assigned the role of being the young woman’s ‘eyes’ while others are assigned the role of ‘mouth’ so that the parts can come together in their assigned roles within the organisational structure to form a whole that resembles a young woman ‘look’. Therefore, when one’s perception switches from the young woman to the old woman, what has changed is not the physical markings in the drawing but the organisational structure of the whole – the perceiving subject has altered the way he organises the given data such that it gives rise to a new whole.<sup>698</sup> Hence, in the old woman perception, the same markings have now adopted a different role within a new organisational structure to form a whole that resembles an old woman ‘look’ instead.

According to Roberts, the markings of the figure can be organised as certain wholes because the way the figure is drawn allows for such organisations in one’s mind. In other words, the markings can be organised in a way that works as a whole for us. In the case of the

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<sup>696</sup> Ibid.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

gestalt figure, the young or old woman ‘look’ could work as a whole for us due to the resemblance that the figure takes when organised in certain ways.<sup>699</sup> In others, it could be due to certain social conventions as in the case of organising a given sequence of sounds in one’s mind as a well formed English sentence. There are limitless possibilities as to what could work as a whole for us. For Roberts, because perception of the whole involves such inherent organisation within the perception, it is also by nature a kind of “organic perception” where the parts are organised as certain “workable wholes” for the individual.<sup>700</sup>

Roberts held that organic perception differs from other kinds of mental organisation such as inference in that, with the former, there is an impression giving element that results from the inherent organisation of the whole that the latter lacks. For instance, organically perceiving the young woman in the gestalt figure involves forming an impression of the appearance of a whole that resembles a young woman ‘look’, whereas merely inferring that the figure resembles a young woman ‘look’ lacks such an impression. Therefore, for these reasons, Roberts characterises the organic perception of the whole as “an impression that results from a power of the mind to synthesise the diverse parts of something that ‘works’ as a whole into an impression of the whole that it works as”.<sup>701</sup>

The idea of organic perception is significant for Roberts’ work because he views the emotional perception of value as a kind of organic perception. Roberts understands the concept of *construal* as a kind of organisation and takes the *emotional perception of value* to be a construal or organisation of some data into a “workable whole” that impinges upon one’s concerns and thereby results in an impression of its value for the subject.<sup>702</sup> Therefore, on his

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<sup>699</sup> Ibid.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

account, emotional perception is also by its very nature a kind of holistic or organic perception.

#### 7.5.1.2 The Problem with Perceiving the Divine Whole

The organic nature of emotional perception together with the principle of organic unity seems to pose a problem for emotionally perceiving the whole of God's inherent goodness. God as the infinite and transcendent good does not seem to be graspable as a whole by a finite human mind. Whatever workable-whole conception of the good that our finite minds are capable of forming, the reality of God's objective inherent goodness will always outrun it in ways we cannot even begin to imagine. As noted by Robert Adams, God's transcendent goodness "exceeds our cognitive grasp in a positive direction" and "vastly surpasses" even our best human conception of the good.<sup>703</sup> Consequently, our limited minds are simply not in a position to grasp the transcendent organising whole that structures the objective inherent value of God. It seems that the workable-whole conception of goodness our finite minds are capable of forming could at best perceive a part of God's overall inherent value. However, as we have seen earlier from the principle of organic unity, it is insufficient to perceive a limited aspect or part of the divine good. Simply perceiving an isolated miniscule axiological part of the limitless whole is equivalent to not perceiving the value of the object at all; in the same way that one cannot be properly said to be perceiving the beauty of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony if all that one hears is a single musical note isolated from the entire piece. This does not mean that one has to have an exhaustive understanding of God's goodness in order to properly perceive his inherent goodness. As noted by Oliver O'Donovan, knowledge of the whole is not "exhaustive knowledge" but a knowledge of the

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<sup>703</sup> Adams (1999), p.51.



“shape of the whole”.<sup>704</sup> That is to say, in understanding the whole, we adequately grasp something of the crucial and defining features of the overall organisational structure of the whole, not necessarily everything there is to know about the whole. With regards to the perception of the divine good, there are good reasons to think that we cannot adequately understand God as a whole such that his inherent goodness can be perceived. For a start, we have little grounds for thinking that we have the capacity to grasp the organising whole of God’s mysterious triune life. Nor can it be reasonably assumed that we have the cognitive capacity for apprehending the kind and magnitude of the relations and parts that constitutes the organising whole of a triune mind that vastly transcends our finite and non-triune minds.

Our inability to perceive the inherent goodness of God as a whole should not be taken to entail our inability to know anything about God as a whole. Perhaps an analogous example would help to clarify the point. In the field of pure mathematics, Euler’s equation is often considered to be the most beautiful and elegant mathematical formula.<sup>705</sup> However, its inherent aesthetic value cannot be perceived by a four year old child since she lacks the cognitive capacity to adequately understand and grasp the complex mathematical relations and concepts involved in appreciating its goodness. The child’s budding understanding of goodness together with her rudimentary grasp of basic mathematical concepts may allow her to perceive the goodness of the parts of the equation (such as the concept of addition). Yet, perceiving the value of the parts does not give us the goodness of the whole, not even partially. This is because, on the principle of organic unity, the value of the whole cannot be arrived at simply by aggregating the value of the parts. Nevertheless, this does not imply that the child can know nothing positive about the equation as a whole. The child may know that the equation as a whole is a mathematical kind of relation and that it is the most beautiful equation known to mankind. She may even aptly form many justified beliefs about the

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<sup>704</sup> O’Donovan (1994), pp.77, 79.

<sup>705</sup> Paul Nahin describes the equation as “an expression of exquisite beauty”. Nahin (2011), p.2.

equation, predicate properties that are true of it and come to trust that it is the most beautiful equation with an unshakable confidence. Indeed, she might be able to do all of the above and yet not perceive its inherent beauty due to her inadequate cognitive capacity. In an analogous fashion, the transcendence of God's goodness does not imply that we can say nothing true about the divine good as a whole or come to have faith in it. Nevertheless, it remains very likely that we do not have the cognitive capacity to adequately grasp the transcendent organising relations and parts that structures the divine Trinitarian life as a whole such that we might perceive his inherent infinite value and beauty with our finite minds.

The usual approaches of Scriptural 'accommodation' and 'analogy' that are commonly deployed to secure the truth value of our theological understanding and language will not help bridge the axiological perception gap either. Reverting to our example, what possible analogy or accommodated "baby talk" can allow the child to perceive the beauty of the Euler's equation?<sup>706</sup> Accommodation and analogy may allow her to know a great deal about Euler's equation and even get the child to trust and believe it is the best equation. However, it cannot get her to perceive the particular way in which it is elegant since that would require the child to adequately grasp the nature of the parts and their complex organising relations which is beyond her cognitive capacity. Furthermore, although analogy may get the child to infer that Euler's equation is beautiful somewhat like her toy bear is beautiful, that does nothing to get the child to perceive and experience the mathematical beauty of the equation. The fundamental limitation with analogy and accommodation is that they ultimately remain at the level of finite human cognition and hence cannot grant us access to an adequate understanding and experience of the infinite and radically transcendent organising relations and parts that is required to perceive divine goodness as a whole.

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<sup>706</sup> The analogy of "baby talk" was first used by Origen to describe the way God accommodates to our understanding when revealing himself in Scripture. See *Contra Celsum*, 4.71.

### 7.5.1.3 Overcoming the Problem of Perceiving the Supreme Good

The challenge of transcendence thus threatens to undermine any simplistic theory which assumes that the divine goodness and beauty of God can be perceived by finite beings in a straightforward sense and hence poses a significant problem to the contemporised theory of spiritual perception we are developing here. Nevertheless, this challenge, I believe, can be surmounted by the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the incarnation. However, before offering my solution, there is an important clarification to be made on what the supreme good actually is. Unlike the generic theism of Adams which postulates God as the supreme good simpliciter, I propose following Edwards' more nuanced position in making the intra-Trinitarian communion the supreme good instead.<sup>707</sup> Therefore, the proper object of spiritual perception is hence the intra-Trinitarian communion rather than God per se.

This then brings us to the heart of the proposed solution which affirms that the intra-Trinitarian communion can be instantiated in two distinct ways. The first being the communion we find between the persons of the Trinity as it is exemplified among their triune and divine minds. The intra-Trinitarian communion as it is instantiated between the infinite divine minds transcends our finite human cognitive capacity to grasp it as a whole in the same way that a child cannot understand the whole of Euler's equation. As finite and non-Trinitarian beings we have an inadequate understanding of what 'love', 'communion' and 'self-giving' would actually amount to within the Trinitarian being. We have little idea of how the divine Trinitarian mind works and what it means for three distinct hypostases that share in a single faculty of will and an ontologically necessary unity to sacrifice, care and

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<sup>707</sup> Without a Trinitarian nuancing of the supreme good, I believe Adams' epistemology of divine intrinsic value is ultimately untenable. Adams has acknowledged the difficulties with grasping and perceiving the transcendent good, however he does not explicitly consider the problem of the organic unity of intrinsic value which I think will pose considerable difficulties for his non-Trinitarian account of divine value perception.

love one another.<sup>708</sup> The Trinitarian mind so radically transcends our human minds that the organising whole and parts of the divine minds continue to elude us and in virtue of which we cannot grasp the way the intra-Trinitarian communion as a whole is exemplified among them.

There is, however, another way in which the supreme good can be instantiated that is more immanent in nature. This alternative is the intra-Trinitarian communion as it is exemplified in the human life and mind of the incarnate Christ. As Katherine Tanner has remarked, Jesus' human life embodies the intra-Trinitarian communion and hence continues the "same pattern of Trinitarian relationships into its own human life so as to give it shape according to that pattern".<sup>709</sup> Therefore, since Jesus' human mind is truly human but yet continues to enjoy and pattern the intra-Trinitarian communion in human form, there is in his humanity a distinct instantiation of the intra-Trinitarian communion. Whereas the intra-Trinitarian communion as it is exemplified among the Triune divine minds cannot be grasped by our human mind as a whole, in its instantiation in the human life and mind of Christ it can be. Hence, on the position I am arguing for, the supreme good as a whole is not in principle unperceivable for finite human minds. It is unperceivable only as it is instantiated among the divine minds. However, its instantiation in the human life of Christ is perceivable by us since Christ shares in the same human kind of mind as us and in his humanity exemplifies the intra-Trinitarian communion. Therefore, according to this view, there is in reality two distinct instantiations of actual supreme value in the world that are incommensurable with each other – one transcendent and unperceivable as a whole, the other immanent and perceivable by a human mind under the right conditions. Yet, the distinct instantiations are both supremely

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<sup>708</sup> Michael Rea has noted that the early Trinitarian traditions as developed by Augustine and the Cappadocians tend to suggest a "shared agency among the persons". To bolster his point he cites the work of Michel Barnes who commented that "the most fundamental conception and articulation in "Nicene" Trinitarian theology of the 380s of the unity among the Three is the understanding that any action of any member of the Trinity is an action of the three inseparably". Rea (2009b), pp.420-421. Barnes (1999), p.156.

<sup>709</sup> Tanner (2010), p.140.

and inherently good in virtue of them being instantiations of communion between uncreated persons.

The proposed account does not imply that there is nothing transcendent in the immanent instantiation of the intra-Trinitarian communion. There is a distinction to be made between a transcendent divine good and a transcendent human good. In the latter, there is only a transcendence of degree but not of kind, while in the former there is both. The immanent intra-Trinitarian communion can be considered of the latter sort since the love of Christ for the Father originates from his human mind and is therefore a human kind of love and communion. Nevertheless, the depth of his human love and self-giving is limitless and is therefore one that we could not exhaustively comprehend. Yet, this transcendence of degree does not prevent us from making sense of that human love and have an adequate conception of what it amounts to.

There is, however, a sense in which the immanent intra-Trinitarian communion is also transcendent in kind and not merely in degree. Christ as the only begotten Son uniquely enjoys a filial relationship and intimacy with the Father that only he has access to. Thus, his experience of the Father's love and his response to that unique love is unlike anything other human beings are acquainted with. In this sense, we can say that Christ's experience of the Father is transcendent in that it is unique to his human mind and is inaccessible to any other human mind. Nevertheless, this inability of other minds to experience the kind of love Christ enjoys with the Father in his humanity is not a limitation of the human mind per se, but a limitation of not being an uncreated person. Therefore, it is not transcendent in the same way the divine good is. On the view I am developing, Christ's sharing with us his Trinitarian-human "unitive drive" is precisely a sharing of that aspect of his unique human experience of the Father as the begotten Son, thus bridging the transcendence of kind in this lesser sense

and allowing us to organically perceive the inherent value of the intra-Trinitarian communion as it is exemplified in the human life of Christ.

One important implication of the argument advanced here is that the organic perception of the supreme good in spiritual delight is not a delight in the goodness of a generic theistic deity but one that is specifically Trinitarian and incarnational. This is an implicit point in Edwards' original theory of spiritual perception and needs to be emphasised in the contemporised account.<sup>710</sup> Moreover, such spiritual delight must also be Christocentric in nature since it is only in our understanding of the man Jesus and the inherent goodness that is exemplified in his human life that the organic whole of the supreme good can be adequately perceived by the human mind. Therefore, spiritual perception of the supreme good is also one that is necessarily grounded in Christocentric wisdom. Without the infusion of the incarnate Christ's unitive drive and an understanding of his embodiment of the intra-Trinitarian communion in human form, we simply do not have the means to perceive the supreme good as a whole and neither are we able to adequately appreciate the supreme good – that is, to delight in and care for the Triune community in virtue of perceiving their inherent goodness as a whole. Outside of Christ, one could only perceive a part of God's goodness which is equivalent to completely missing the whole. Hence, no one could appropriately perceive and appreciate the inherent value of the supreme good and thus arrive at the purpose of creation outside of Christocentric wisdom.

#### 7.5.2 The Problem of Alienness

Having addressed the challenge posed by the organicity of intrinsic value, we are now in a position to return to the problem of alienness. The alienness of the transcendent good, as

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<sup>710</sup> Although Edwards did not arrive at this point from the angle of holistic perception, the conclusion here is very compatible with his emphasis on perceiving the Trinitarian glory of God in the incarnate Christ.

identified by Robert Adams, pertains to the idea that the goodness of God vastly surpasses our limited cognitive capacities to adequately grasp them and is therefore alien to our familiar human evaluative concepts and intuitions.<sup>711</sup> Consequently, the transcendent good could at times seem contrary to even our best human conception of goodness and hence appear to imply some form of divine axiological deficiency from our human point of view. The alienness in question here is in relation to our evaluative capacities and thus could be termed as *evaluative alienness*.

In addition to evaluative alienness, there is another distinct kind of alienness regarding the transcendent good that was not covered by Adam's work but nevertheless can be found in the writings of Edwards. Alienness of this sort pertains to the idea that the divine good cannot appropriately satisfy the legitimate longings and desires of our human nature due to its transcendent quality and therefore cannot practically function as the supreme good for human beings. Alienness in this sense relates to one's motivations and hence can be considered as a kind of *motivational alienness*. The two kinds of alienness, as highlighted by Adams and Edwards, each poses a distinct problem for spiritual perception and shall be considered in turn.

The issue of motivational alienness was raised by Edwards in his sermon on *The Excellency of Christ* and is related to our prior discussion on his view regarding the concatenation of excellencies in Christ. For Edwards, one of God's intentions for humanity is that he might be the object of their wholehearted devotion and the one who is at the center of all the legitimate longings of their created human nature.<sup>712</sup> In other words, God is to be the supreme good for humanity not just in the objective sense but also in the subjective sense of being the ultimate object of their legitimate motivations. However, this goal is also

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<sup>711</sup> See section 7.2

<sup>712</sup> "Excellency of Christ," in WJE 19:589.

problematic given that God's goodness in his divinity is too transcendent for finite human beings to adequately appreciate and enjoy as the supreme good for them. In particular, humans crave for a legitimate kind of intimate friendship and companionship that God in his transcendent majesty is not suited to provide.<sup>713</sup> There is hence a kind of relational distance between God and man that prevents God from being the subjective supreme good for humanity that he is meant to be.

Edwards held that the incarnation bridges that distance and allows God in Christ to be the supreme good for us by meeting the inclinations of our human nature which God in his divinity cannot appropriately satisfy. However, it is not that Christ's human goodness simply replaces the divine good. Rather, as we have seen earlier, Christ opens up a new way of perceiving God's goodness by concatenating the divine and human excellencies in himself such that the inclinations of our hearts (which include inclinations towards the divine and human excellencies) can be met in him.<sup>714</sup> As remarked by Robert Jenson, Edwards' Christological "polarities function here together in a rich dialectic to overcome the seeming impossibility, to free God in Christ from Deity's seeming necessary separation from us."<sup>715</sup> In this way, the alien divine good which finite humans struggle to appreciate and enjoy can, through a conjunction with Christ's more familiar human goodness, be reconfigured to provide a new Christocentric understanding and perception of God's goodness that is able to function as the subjective supreme good for us. For this reason, Christocentric wisdom also plays a crucial role in overcoming the challenge of divinity's motivational alienness.

In addition to motivational alienness there is also the issue of *evaluative alienness* which creates a different problem from its motivational variant. Motivational alienness pertains more directly to the natural inclinations of human nature rather than to one's

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<sup>713</sup> Ibid.

<sup>714</sup> CF section 7.3.3.

<sup>715</sup> Jenson (1988), p.117.



evaluative standard and hence remains relatively neutral with regards to one's normative conception of goodness. Evaluative alienness, on the other hand, is an alienness that arises from the divine good surpassing even our best normative human conception of goodness in such a way that it may, at times, result in an apparent tension or incompatibility between divine goodness and our normative axiological conception. An example of this would be God's command to exterminate the Canaanites, which appears to contradict some of our deeply held conception of moral goodness and thereby seemingly imply some form of moral deficiency in God from our human point of view.<sup>716</sup> This perceived divine deficiency suggests a certain unworthiness of God to be worshipped and therefore challenges the possibility of spiritual perception.

In addressing the problem of evaluative alienness, our prior discussion regarding the organicity of value is highly significant. As mentioned, the supreme good as manifested among the divine minds cannot be adequately grasped as a whole by our limited human minds. Hence, the divine good that we do grasp and subject to our moral evaluation is only a miniscule part of the infinite whole. It is, therefore, not representative of the whole and thus not truly an evaluation of the divine good per se but simply the part that we are able to grasp with our limited cognitive capacity.<sup>717</sup> In other words, there is no real adequate way of evaluating the whole of the supreme good as instantiated in divinity with our limited human understanding and axiological conceptions. Nevertheless, this need not lead us to a kind of value skepticism regarding the supreme good. The supreme good as instantiated in the human

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<sup>716</sup> Many have found that the common approaches employed to bring the genocide accounts in line with our moral sensibilities to be unsatisfactory. For a survey and criticism of these attempts refer to Morriston (2012).

<sup>717</sup> Hence, my position regarding the charge of divine immorality is similar to what is labelled "skeptical theism" in the literature on the problem of evil. One of the central theses of skeptical theism as articulated by Michael Bergmann is that "we have no good reason for thinking that the total moral value or disvalue we perceive in certain complex state of affairs accurately reflects the total moral value or disvalue they really have." Bergmann (2009), p.379.

life of Christ can be understood as a whole by the human mind and hence provides a way of evaluating the whole of the supreme good from a human point of view.

The significance of all this for the problem of evaluative alienness is twofold. First, the human goodness of Christ must be taken to be the most representative and accurate depiction of the whole of the supreme good for human minds. Hence, our human discernment and evaluation of the true axiological nature of that supreme good must be centered upon an evaluation of Christ's human life. Second, the divine good that we grasp only partially and at times find offensive must always be understood in light of the whole that we do grasp in Christ. However offensive and deficient the divine good may at times appear to be from our human axiological perspective, it has to be recognized that this is not the final word on the fundamental axiological nature of the intra-Trinitarian communion. It is only in Christ and his work of redemption that we do perceive the whole of the supreme good in human form and thereby apprehend its deepest axiological nature from a human point of view. Thus, our evaluative grasp of the divine good must always be understood in light of the more epistemically foundational and authoritative understanding of the human goodness of Christ.

The centrality of Christ for our human evaluation of the supreme good once again points us back to Christocentric wisdom for dealing with the problem of evaluative alienness. Our wisdom understanding of the nature of divinity as transcendent leads us to expect that the divine good would likely at times appear deficient and even offensive from our finite point of view. Christocentric wisdom makes allowance for that evaluative alienness and grants us the flexibility and open mindedness to avoid making hasty and inappropriate evaluations in our encounter with transcendent goodness. More significantly, it also grants us the understanding to place the seemingly deficient divine good in the appropriate perspective and allows for the

wisdom to trust that God is ultimately worthy of worship in light of the supreme goodness we do perceive as a whole in the incarnate Christ.<sup>718</sup>

## 7.6 The Nature of Christocentric Wisdom

### 7.6.1 Christocentric Wisdom and Spiritual Perception

Our consideration of the three challenges to spiritual perception points us to the necessity and centrality of Christocentric wisdom for perceiving the supreme good. Understood from this perspective, it is hence possible to conceptualize the spiritual delight that is operative in spiritual perception as a kind of Christocentric wisdom-emotion where the emotion of joy and delight in the supreme good is one that results from the understanding, concern and enjoyment that is constitutive of Christocentric wisdom. In this way, spiritual delight is thus psychologically grounded upon and sustained by Christocentric wisdom. Moreover, in light of their intimate relationship, Christocentric wisdom can also be considered as the psychological core of spiritual perception and, by extension, transforming grace as well. It is a foundational capacity to produce the appropriate kind of supernatural spiritual delight in God that Edwards sees as the motivational heart and engine of Christian sanctification. Therefore, in this sense, Christocentric wisdom could also be said to be the psychological core of transforming grace and spiritual perception.

Given the foundational importance of Christocentric wisdom to the contemporised account of spiritual perception, the final section of the chapter will be devoted to unpacking this notion further. As alluded to earlier, Christocentric wisdom is constituted by the

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<sup>718</sup> Alvin Plantinga provides a similar response to the problem of evil. He comments that when “we recall the love revealed in the incarnation and atonement, and we see that whatever God did, he must indeed have a good reason, even if we can’t see what the reason is”. However, he did not address the issue of why the love revealed in the atonement should be taken to be more authoritative or foundational for our understanding of God’s moral character to begin with. Plantinga (2011), pp.112-113.

Christological understanding of creation's ultimate meaning and the appropriate love and concern for its Christological destiny. Such an understanding and concern is in turn formed via the infusion of Christ's unitive drive by the Spirit and the content and vision of Scripture. This understanding within Christocentric wisdom need not be exhausted by the content of Scripture. The character of wisdom, as proposed by Roberts, is an orientation giving kind of understanding that grasps the significant connections between the object of knowledge, human flourishing and one's current situation.<sup>719</sup> In any given instance of wisdom-understanding, there could be numerous connections between the three and not all of them are explicitly captured by the content of Scripture. Nevertheless, there is an essential core to this understanding which is communicated to us in Scripture's content whereby we can grasp the most crucial and significant aspects of the overall shape of human flourishing, its inherent value, the means of obtaining it and its significance for one's life. The following are some of the crucial features of this core essential understanding and it relates to many facets of our discussion throughout the dissertation.

#### 7.6.2 The Core of Christocentric Wisdom Understanding

First, as mentioned in our discussion in this chapter, Christocentric wisdom at its core understands the general Christological shape of human purpose and flourishing. Second, it also grasps the importance and inherent goodness of that Christological destiny through a spiritual perception of God's evangelical glory in Christ. Third, there is the essential understanding that pertains to the means by which humanity can participate and arrive at the supreme good; namely, through incorporation into Christ. The nature of this incorporation or union, for Edwards, can be divided into two distinct but related aspects. The first pertains to the church's spiritual incorporation into Christ's love and enjoyment of the Father as the only

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<sup>719</sup> Roberts (2011), p.24.

Son through the grace of infusion.<sup>720</sup> The second relates to believers' incorporation into his institutional body as members of the body of Christ. Working within the traditional Reformed doctrine of justification,<sup>721</sup> Edwards espouses this institutional sense of incorporation in which believers by faith become members of an institutional body led by Christ, her federal<sup>722</sup> head.<sup>723</sup> As their head, Christ suffered the penalty of God's righteous judgment on their behalf and imputed to them the righteousness of his active obedience.<sup>724</sup> Consequently, believers are conferred a new normative institutional status within the society of God and man, through what Christ has done for them as their federal or institutional head.

The significance of institutional incorporation is not just limited to the forgiveness of sin. It is also the necessary condition and means for humanity to participate and arrive at her appointed supreme good – a loving communal life lived in pursuit and enjoyment of God in Christ. This necessity is due in part to the fact that living a human life in wholehearted pursuit of God requires a legitimate socio-political institutional reality where rights, duties, authority and privileges are distributed and organised.<sup>725</sup> Institutional membership in the body of Christ brings about a change in our normative status that grants us the rights, duties and privileges within the community of God and man that are required to legitimately and effectively pursue God as the supreme Good. Therefore, it is essential that the understanding of Christocentric

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<sup>720</sup> "Excellency of Christ," in WJE 19:593. Refer to our earlier discussion in section 3.3.7 and 7.3.3 for more details on this point.

<sup>721</sup> In recent scholarship, scholars such as Morimoto, Hunsinger and Schafer have tried to deny that Edwards held to a traditional Reformed emphasis of forensic justification by faith alone and moves closer to the Catholic tradition by grounding justification partially in the inward dispositional change of the believer. However, the views advanced by these scholars do not address the foundational theological commitment of Edwards – that we are united to Christ by faith alone whose perfect obedience alone can satisfy God's unchangeable standard of righteousness. This foundational commitment of Edwards throughout his corpus of work was meticulously explored by Craig Biehl in his doctoral work and makes the 'Catholic' understanding of Edwards very improbable. Douglas Sweeney makes the point well he remarked that "Edwards often sounded more Catholic than many Protestants do... But he never intended this; he was stoutly anti-Catholic". Morimoto (1995), pp.96-101. Hunsinger (2004). Schafer (1951). Biehl (2009). Sweeney (2010), p.164.

<sup>722</sup> Like most Calvinists of his time, Edwards was a federal theologian. CF. Sweeney (2009), p.158.

<sup>723</sup> "All God's Methods Are Most Reasonable," in WJE 14:180.

<sup>724</sup> "Justification by Faith," in WJE 19:187.

<sup>725</sup> Hence Edwards' eschatological vision of Christ's millennial kingdom is one of a grand social-political order where the whole of human society, including economics and politics, is organised around the pursuit of God. For details, see McDermott (1992), pp.50-92.

wisdom comes to include the significant aspects of one's normative status within the divine-human community and its accompanying obligations and rights that were acquired through institutional membership in the body of Christ.

The understanding of one's normative status in Christ is also intimately related to another aspect that constitutes the core of Christocentric wisdom – the normative engagement of God's divine address to humanity. Christocentric wisdom, as it is formed by the content of Scripture, is also constituted by the illocutionary content of Scripture. In our discussion in chapter four, we have explored the way in which Scripture can function as the medium of divine discourse and thereby alter our normative status simply in virtue of our understanding of the illocutionary acts performed via Scripture.<sup>726</sup> This is significant because one of the primary ways in which we encounter the authoritative agency of God amidst his silence is through the illocutionary acts he performs by means of Scripture. God leads, commands, promises and encourages his people through the medium of Scripture and without a grasp of Scripture's illocutionary dimension we miss the normative engagement that God has with us through the Bible. Moreover, because our institutional status within the divine-human society is partly dependent on the illocutionary acts of God performed via Scripture (especially his promises), it is hence also contingent upon our grasp of the normative engagement that God has with us by way of the Bible.

The above are some of the crucial understandings embedded within the core of Christocentric wisdom. As the core, this understanding (which is not limited to propositional understanding) can be matured, deepened and extended upon by increasing our grasp of the myriad relations and connections between human flourishing and the diverse aspects of human life and experience. Christocentric wisdom may begin in seminal form within a person and requires maturing through various means before it could empower one to love God

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<sup>726</sup> See section 4.7

wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, its most crucial and essential content is already embedded within an appropriate elementary understanding of the gospel message and the infusion of Christ's unitive drive within the psyche of the redeemed. Therefore, it is available, at least in seminal form, to all believers who are united to Christ by faith in his redemptive work. Moreover, it is also likely that Christocentric wisdom might require the community of the church for its proper formation and maturation. As noted by Alvin Plantinga, the way our human cognitive functioning is designed may require a cognitive environment where other people's cognitive faculties function and respond to us in a certain way.<sup>727</sup> Hence, the formation and proper development of Christocentric wisdom could also require the appropriate functioning of the church community as the proper cognitive environment for its maturation.

When we consider the core constituents of Christocentric wisdom, we can begin to appreciate just how foundational it is for the Christian life. Without it, we lose our overall value orientation and the capacity to adequately perceive the supreme good in spiritual delight, thereby also losing the ability to enjoy and love God's inherent goodness for its own sake. In our earlier discussion on divine silence, we noted how Christocentric wisdom serves as the overall organisational structure and motivational impetus for coordinating the various disparate skills and psychological resources into a unified perceptual capacity for perceiving the goodness of God. A similar point could be made for Christian living in general. Christocentric wisdom serves as the foundational virtue that organises and motivates all other existing virtues or to be acquired virtues and integrates them into a new Christocentric capacity to live a flourishing Christian life. Therefore, it is the foundational basis upon which all other Christian virtues are formed and the psychological core from which the resurrection life of Christ is lived out within believers. It is only within the context of this engraced

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<sup>727</sup> Plantinga (1993), p.82.

psychological core and human agency that virtues, disciplines, skills and practices for spiritual formation have their proper place.<sup>728</sup> Taken in this way, Christocentric wisdom thus also serves as the foundational supernatural virtue for overcoming the presence of human vice and immaturity, providing the proper motivation and understanding to acquire other virtues and skills that are required to subdue them. Therefore, all Christian virtues, and indeed all of Christian life, are shot through with the foundational understanding and motivation that Christocentric wisdom provides.

### 7.6.3 Christocentric Wisdom and the Mind of Christ

In addition to its function as a foundational Christian virtue, the formation of Christocentric wisdom is also ultimately the formation and transformation of the believer's mind into one that is structurally akin to the human mind of Christ. Mark McIntosh, in his insightful discussion on the mind of Christ, draws upon Robert Jewett's analysis of 1 Corinthians 2:16 and characterises the Pauline concept of the "mind of Christ" as a kind of gospel-centric "noetic framework" – that is, a certain "constellation of thoughts which is given in the gospel" that could "make up the consciousness of a person" and provide one with "access to a new way of discerning reality".<sup>729</sup> Therefore, for believers to have the mind of Christ in the sense described by McIntosh is then essentially to adopt a "noetic framework" consisting of a pattern of thoughts, construals, emotions, concerns and enjoyments that are decisively shaped by and centered upon the significance of Christ's life and ministry.<sup>730</sup> Through this "noetic framework" believers then come to share in Christ's experience of the world and his communion with the Father. Understood in this way, Christocentric wisdom

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<sup>728</sup> Without this foundational basis of inward grace, Christian virtue formation runs into theological concerns over Pelagianism.

<sup>729</sup> Jewett (1971), p.378. Cited by Mark McIntosh in McIntosh (2005), p.136.

<sup>730</sup> McIntosh (2005), p.132.



certainly qualifies as a kind of “noetic framework” that would count as the “mind of Christ”.<sup>731</sup>

However, more than just being a cognitive and affective pattern, Christocentric wisdom can also be considered the mind of Christ because there is, in the words of Alan Torrance, a kind of “semantic participation” in the language understanding and usage of Christ in Christocentric wisdom.<sup>732</sup> As noted by Torrance, our language carries with it a myriad of associations, conceptual understandings, cultural baggage and connections that shape our knowledge, experience, perception and conception of the world.<sup>733</sup> Hence, the church’s adoption of the language of Christ as it is given in the biblical language of Scripture is also a way of shaping or structuring her understanding, thereby “generating new forms of perception” for her community.<sup>734</sup> Torrance’s point about the experiential or perceptual influence of language confirms our discussion in chapter five regarding the intimate relationship between understanding and experience. However, semantic participation, for Torrance, goes beyond the structuring influence of language in perception and experience. Significantly, he also wishes to emphasise the fact that the church participates in the illocutionary rules that govern the language use of Christ within the divine-human society that he inaugurates. As we have seen in chapter four, illocutionary acts are governed by the conventional illocutionary rules that lay down the “necessary and sufficient conditions for sentence utterance, where the social rationale of the rule is the facilitation of communication”.<sup>735</sup> The basic idea of this latter aspect of semantic participation is that the church participates in the communicative speech between Christ and the Father by

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<sup>731</sup> Daniel Ebert’s study of Philippians 2:5-11 explicitly links Paul’s conception of Christian wisdom to the mind of Christ and complements Jewett’s observation regarding 1 Corinthians 2:16. He remarks that “to have this “mind” as followers of Jesus is a call to a certain “way of life”. This “way of life” is the path of wisdom found in Christ and the gospel. It is a call to live with the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16), who is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24,30)”. Ebert (2011), p.115.

<sup>732</sup> Torrance (1996), p.325.

<sup>733</sup> Ibid., p.334.

<sup>734</sup> Ibid., p.342.

<sup>735</sup> Alston (2000), p.272. See also section 4.6.1 of this dissertation

participating in (1) the illocutionary rules that govern their speech and (2) the institutional status of Christ that allows the church to meet the conditions for felicitous performance of the illocutionary actions. Many of the illocutionary actions addressed to the Father and performed by the man Jesus are felicitous (done according to the divine-human illocutionary rules within the intra-Trinitarian society) only because of the institutional standing that Christ uniquely possesses as the obedient begotten Son. Through institutional incorporation into the institutional body of Christ, the church comes to share partially in the unique institutional status of Christ that allows her to also felicitously perform many of the same illocutionary acts. In doing so, believers are hence able to acquire various rights and obligations within the divine-human community that are appropriate only to the incarnate Son, thereby partially inducting them into Christ's own human "form of life" with the Father. According to Torrance, this language constituted "form of life" within the Trinitarian society that we share in Christ profoundly shapes our understanding and experience of God and draws us into the communion that Christ has with the Father.<sup>736</sup>

Significant as the "noetic framework" and "semantic participation" aspects of the mind of Christ are, they remain too generic and "external" (to use Alston's term) to do justice to the language of uniqueness and internality in Scripture.<sup>737</sup> The same general process of mind formation as described above can be had not just for the mind of Christ but also for the apostle Paul, Gandhi or any other human mind. In contrast, I suggest that what makes Christocentric wisdom a unique kind of mind formation is that it is a language shaped noetic framework that is also literally constituted by an aspect of the actual human mind of Christ – his Trinitarian-human unitive drive. The Holy Spirit's ministry in infusing Christ's human

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<sup>736</sup> Torrance (1996), p.360.

<sup>737</sup> The passage in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 makes a close connection between receiving the Spirit who alone knows the mind of God and having the mind of Christ. This strongly suggests that the mind of Christ is internal and uniquely available to believers in a similar way that the indwelling Spirit is. See also section 3.3.1 for Alston's criticism of "externality".

unitive drive and granting us the mental organising resources to overcome our aspect blindness provides us partial access to the actual mental disposition of Christ and his delight towards the Father in a way that we simply do not have with any other human mind. Hence, the human mind of Christ is also more intimate and internal to us than any other human mind besides our own.

### 7.7 Summation

We began our chapter by considering three challenges to the very possibility of spiritual perception – the challenge of sinful understanding and concern, hiddenness and transcendence. In the course of our discussion we have seen how each of these challenges require a kind of Christocentric wisdom to overcome. Hence, given the necessity and centrality of Christocentric wisdom for perceiving the supreme good in spiritual delight, it can therefore also be considered the psychological grounds and core of spiritual perception and transformative grace. It is by means of such wisdom that the Christian life is lived out in the grace of Christ and blindness to the supreme goodness of God is overcome.

Through the gradual maturation of this Christocentric psychological core, believers are transformed into the likeness of Christ by coming to attain a psychological structure that is akin to the human mind of Christ. This engraced Christ-like mind is also one that shares in the communion of Christ with the Father and experiences, perceives, values and knows the glory and beauty of the intra-Trinitarian communion. For Edwards, such glorious and transformative affective knowledge among God's people is also his eternal purpose for creating and redeeming the world.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

### 8.1 Spiritual Perception Contemporised

We began our study with the aim of contemporising Jonathan Edwards' theory of spiritual perception, and over the course of our discussion, we have examined various aspects of his theory and considered how it could be deepened, updated and revised in light of the work of Robert Roberts and other related discussions in contemporary analytic philosophy. The main features of the contemporised account are as follows.

The first significant revision made to Edwards' original theory was to establish a distinction between converting and sanctifying grace which Edwards conflates together. This distinction is a theological advancement over Edwards' position in that it circumvents the problem of receiving the gift of sanctifying grace logically prior to one's union with Christ's humanity by faith.

The second major aspect of spiritual perception that was revised and expanded upon is Edwards' conception of infusion which he conceives as a direct and immediate implantation of the Holy Spirit within the human soul acting after the manner of a disposition or vital principle. This Edwardsean notion of infusion was further developed by drawing on the 'partial life sharing' model of indwelling as proposed by Alston and, consequently, a possible illuminating model for understanding the nature of infusion was provided.

Despite the refinements to Edwards' doctrine of infusion, it is theologically problematic. By insisting on a direct and unmediated union between divinity and humanity logically prior to the saints' union with Christ's humanity, Edwards' understanding of infusion undermines the mediation of Christ's humanity in their union with God. Moreover, when his doctrine of infusion is coupled with his commitment to divine simplicity, it results

in a theologically problematic model of theosis that blurs the distinction between creature and creator.

In light of the problems raised, a few important revisions that could help advance Edwards' doctrine of infusion were proposed. In particular, it was argued that indwelling or infused grace is better understood as the sharing of the incarnate Christ's own ongoing human "unitive drive" towards the Father with the church through the Holy Spirit. The unitive drive is an aspect of the human mind of the living Christ. More precisely, it is an aspect of his *sui generis* intra-Trinitarian love for the Father in human form that is made freely available to believers by the Spirit. When the unitive drive is infused within an individual, it opens up new emotions, enjoyments, perceptions and motivations for union and forms of life with God that are unavailable and psychologically alien to those without this drive.

In addition to introducing the concept of the unitive drive, an important distinction between the *content* and *means* of infusion was also made. On the revised model, the infused or shared content is taken to be an aspect of the human mind of Christ (rather than the divine mind on Alston's and Edwards' proposal) while the Spirit is conceived as the divine agent by which that human unitive drive of Christ is shared, nurtured and sustained within the believer's psyche.

The third major advancement that was made on Edwards' original theory is the conceptual expansion upon the nature and role of Scripture's content in spiritual perception. The illocutionary dimension of Scripture's content was highlighted in a way that was never adequately and explicitly addressed in Edwards' account. This development is significant because it explains the way in which Scripture can function as the medium of divine discourse through which God is able to alter the normative status of its readers and lay upon them certain *prima facie* duties and obligations. Moreover, it also draws attention to the fact

that, in spiritual perception, we encounter the personal agency and authority of God. The divine discourse that constitutes spiritual perception thus brings us into a normative engagement with God through his illocutionary actions performed via Scripture.

In addition to the illocutionary dimension, Scripture's content also comprises of other significant aspects. Of particular note is the personal, aesthetic, affective content and literary vision projected by the whole of Scripture considered as a single unified divine work. These elements which constitute Scripture's content, when sufficiently understood, afford her readers with an obligation and value laden vision of the world of the text and an affective experience of her central character – God. Hence, understanding the content of Scripture is as much about apprehending the projected vision, its personal, affective and aesthetic content as it is about what is being said (i.e., its illocutionary content).

With regards to the function of Scripture's content in spiritual perception, it was argued that Scripture serves an indispensable role in our apprehension of God's unrivalled goodness because it provides believers with a unique and essential means of understanding and grasping God's supreme value through its gospel-shaped Christological content and vision. This particular content and Scriptural vision of God profoundly shapes our understanding of him and his relationship with us, and gives rise to a unique emotional perception of his supreme goodness that is partially structured by the content of Scripture.

One important result of the discussion on the nature of Scripture's content is the recovery of the transformative potency of the Word which was lost in Edwards' original account. On the contemporised model, Scripture's content is not reducible to mere signs that refer to ideas in the mind, nor does it merely provide an opportunity for the formation of the gracious affections. Instead, Scripture's content plays an integral role in the economy of

soteriological grace by (1) transforming the normative status of her readers and (2) centrally structuring and constituting one's perception of divine value.

The fourth major advancement of Edwards' theory of spiritual perception is in the area of spiritual delight. Edwards originally conceives of spiritual delight as a kind of simple discrete sensation. However, such a characterisation renders it unable to possess the kind of intentionality that Edwards hopes to attribute to spiritual delight. In view of the difficulty, an alternative account was offered. Specifically, it was proposed that (1) an Edwardsean spiritual delight can be better understood as a kind of emotion, and that (2) spiritual perception is an emotional perception of divine value. Drawing upon the work of Roberts, a fruitful way of understanding the internal structure of spiritual delight in its various forms was also proposed. On this account, spiritual delight is conceived as a kind of emotional construal that incorporates the affective effects of the infused unitive drive and the content of Scripture to bring about a supernatural delight in the goodness of God.

In addition to developing the idea of spiritual delight, Edwards' affirmation of the Christocentricity of spiritual perception was also expanded upon in our contemporisation effort. In particular, we considered the difficulties that the three challenges of transcendence, hiddenness and sinfulness pose for spiritual perception and argued that the understanding of Christ is necessary and foundational to overcoming these challenges; hence, making spiritual perception and delight necessarily Christocentric.

The fifth and final major advancement of spiritual perception pertains to the conceptual development regarding the nature of the underlying psychological disposition or capacity for spiritual perception and delight. Drawing upon our ongoing discussion throughout the dissertation and the work of Roberts and Edwards, it was argued that the ability for spiritual perception and delight is due to a kind of wisdom-like disposition that is

formed by one's understanding of Scripture, especially as it pertains to Jesus (in whom and by whom the mystery of God's purpose for creation is revealed and fulfilled), and the infused "unitive drive" of Christ. This seminal virtue is what was termed *Christocentric wisdom*. Christocentric wisdom is the foundational Christian virtue that orders, informs, motivates and frames every other virtue and integrates them into a new Christocentric whole. For this reason, Christocentric wisdom is also considered the psychological core of transforming grace. It is the foundational basis upon which all other Christian virtues are formed and the psychological core from which the resurrection life of Christ is lived out within believers.

On the contemporised account, an important conceptual connection was also made between Christocentric wisdom and the mind of Christ. It was proposed that the gradual maturation of Christocentric wisdom within believers is ultimately the transformation of the faithful into the likeness of Christ and coming to attain a psychological structure that is akin to the human mind of Christ. This engraced Christ-like mind is also one that experiences, perceives, values and knows the glory and beauty of the intra-Trinitarian communion. For Edwards, such glorious and character orienting affective knowledge among God's people is also his eternal purpose for creating and redeeming the world.

In the five major ways outlined above, the study undertaken in this dissertation has contemporised and advanced Edwards' doctrine of spiritual perception. In doing so, it also offers a modern and illuminating theoretical model for understanding the theological psychology of transforming grace that connects spiritual perception to the various spheres of contemporary discussion, hence opening up new possibilities for interaction with current scholarship and ideas.



## 8.2 Concluding Remarks

Spiritual perception, for Edwards, is fundamentally the regenerated heart functioning epistemically for a kind of epistemic acquaintance with the glory of God. As observed by McClymond,

Spiritual perception is one of Edwards' most encompassing themes. It links idea and emotion, the cognitive and affective. It meshes experiential manifestation with philosophical reflection. It brings together God and nature. It joins the beautiful to the divine. It connects theology with spirituality.<sup>738</sup>

In this study, we have shown how this foundational Edwardsean insight can be deepened and contemporised in light of modern philosophical scholarship, especially Roberts' account of the emotions. Roberts has argued that emotions are the only kind of human mental state that integrates Christian propositions, perceptions and concerns into a unified experience, and hence is able to play a cardinal role in Christian life and knowledge.<sup>739</sup> In particular, they are the only kind of human mental state that allows one to perceive God in love and in the great truths of Scripture. Moreover, as we have been suggesting in the dissertation, the emotional perception of God can also have divine origins and constituents in the form of its Spirit-aided construal, the divine address of God and the infused unitive drive of Christ. Roberts' account of the emotions therefore has the potential to facilitate a kind of en-graced seeing or perceiving of God's goodness in intra-Trinitarian love that is broadly in line with Edwards' general theological psychology and epistemology. It is in and through such engraced emotional perception that believers experience the beauty of God in Christ with new eyes of the heart.

With regards to future research, I would like to build upon the theoretical groundwork laid in this study to further expand our understanding regarding the psychology of Christian discipleship and transformation. In particular, I hope to utilise the present work as a fruitful

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<sup>738</sup> McClymond (1998), p.26.

<sup>739</sup> Roberts (1992a), p.83.

basis to explore neighbouring topics that are of practical interest to the Christian community such as the theological psychology of sin, the psychology of faith and various specific psychopathologies. The aspiration is to progress towards a contemporary and illuminating theological psychology of transforming grace that could meaningfully interact with the church and modern psychological scholarship.

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